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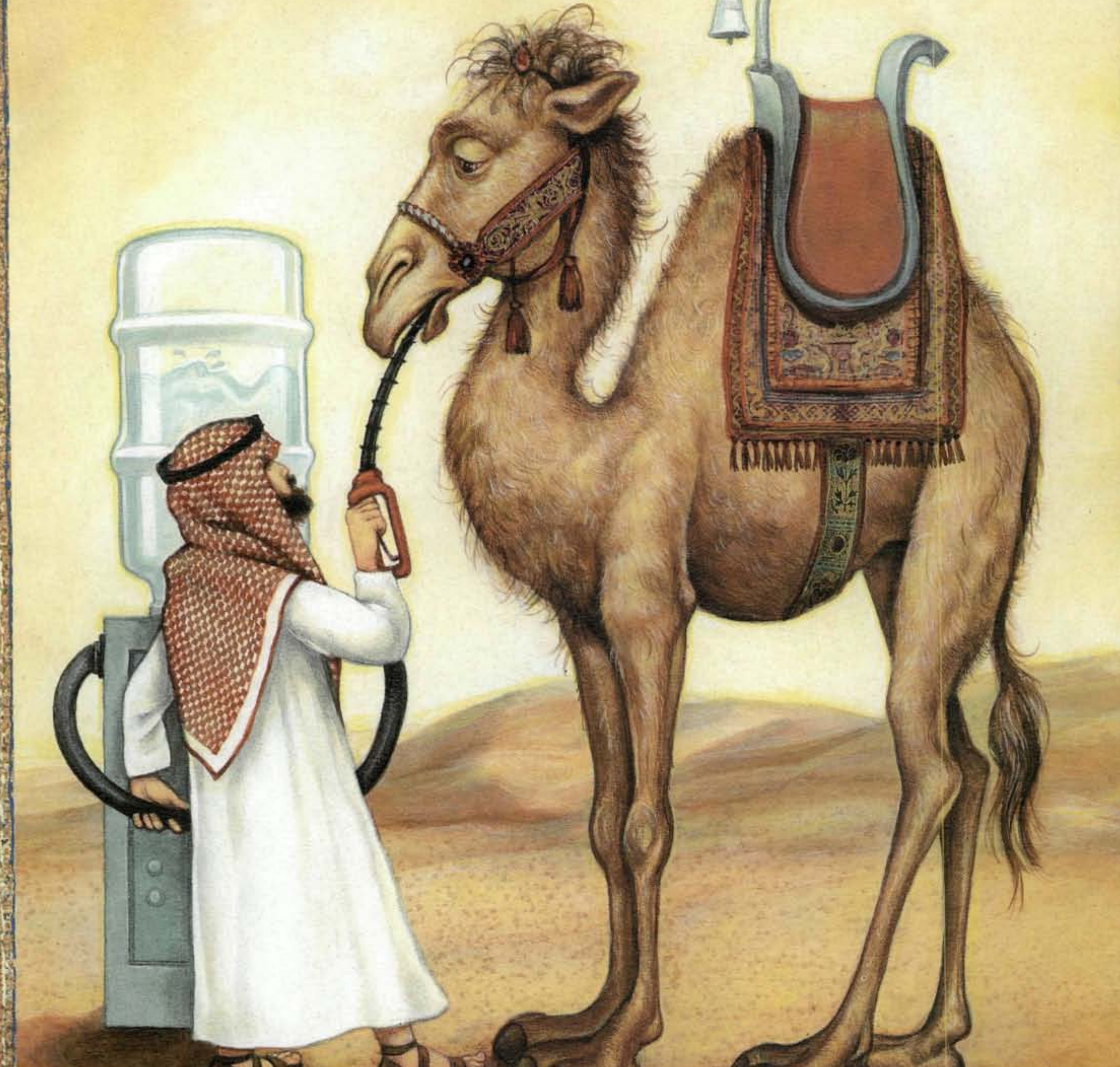
MAY 22, 2006



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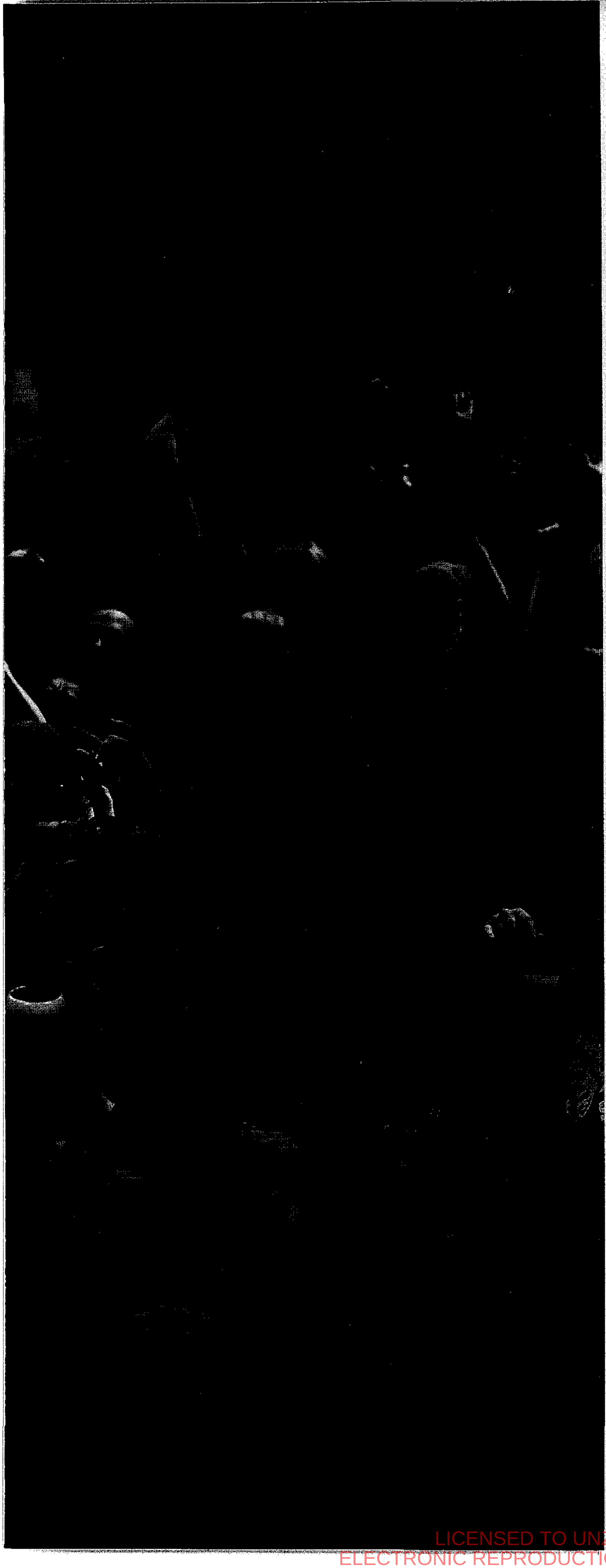

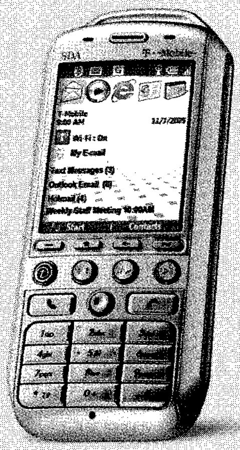

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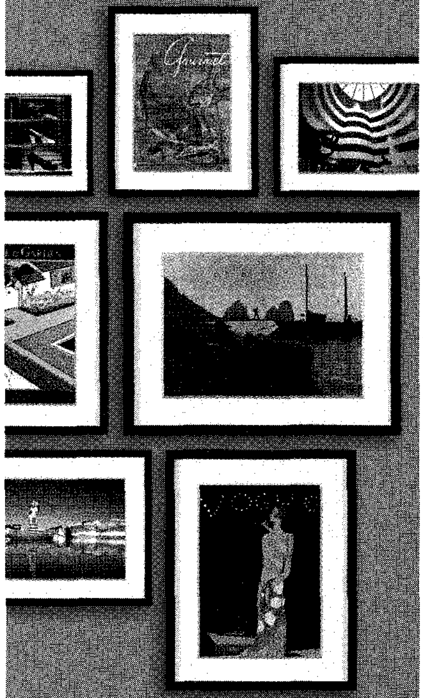

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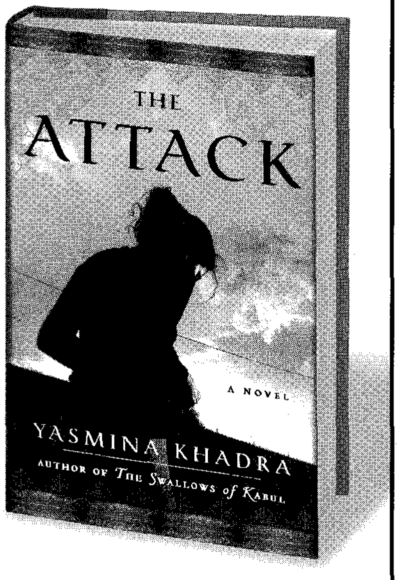

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—AZAR NAFISI, author of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*

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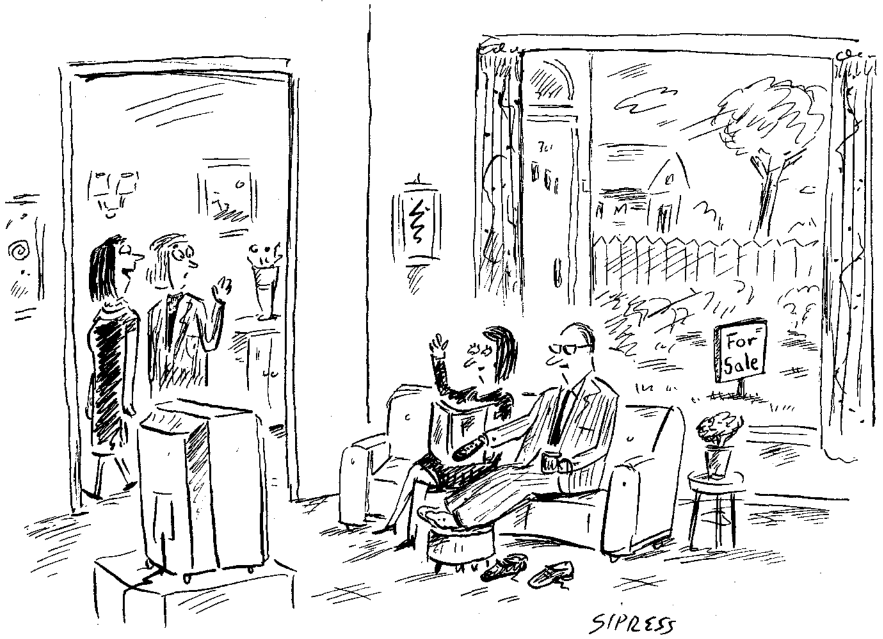

"Those are the Petersons—they're waiting for our price to go down."

THE MAIL

ISLANDS UNITED

In his essay on the Tokelau islands' recent rejection of self-determination, Ian Parker describes how the United Nations seems to believe that independence—in any form—is essentially a good thing ("Birth of a Nation?," May 1st). But why should the remarkably peaceful inhabitants of Tokelau wish to cut themselves off from New Zealand, a country whose passports bear both its Maori and English names, where a quarter of the population of the largest city is Polynesian, where television and radio announcers are schooled in correct Maori pronunciation, and where a good percentage of our artists and authors are part Maori? There is a commonality of culture among the various Polynesian island groups, and an argument can be made in favor of a greater "Polynesian nation" stretching from Hawaii in the North Pacific to Tahiti in the South.

John A. F. Hopkins
Kamakura, Japan

MUSIC TO LIVE BY

David Owen suggests that the move of Muzak's headquarters from Seattle to South Carolina, after the company's 1997 rebranding, was a way to "sever" itself from its "stodgy" past ("The Soundtrack of Your Life," April 10th). That had actually occurred ten years earlier, in 1987, when Muzak merged with Yesco and the company was relocated to Yesco's headquarters in Seattle. I worked there after the move, along with Yesco's innovative programmers, many of whom were musicians themselves, and its visionary president and founder, Mark Torrance. Yesco invented the idea of foreground music, recorded by the original artists, and, while the Muzak name was retained, it was clear that the new Muzak would be entirely different from the old.

Phillip L. Jordan
Seattle, Wash.

I found it distressing to hear that Muzak regards its biggest competitor as silence. I sometimes feel as if I'm the only person in America who would prefer to shop, work, travel, and use public rest rooms in silence. What's wrong with being alone with one's own thoughts and internal melodies (or one's own portable music player)? Muzak doesn't make me spend more—I spend less, since I tend to flee the store as soon as I can. But Owen's fascinating article did tell me one useful thing: where Muzak comes from, and thus how to contact someone at the company to express my irritation with almost everything for which it stands.

Ann Calandro
Flemington, N.J.

HERZOG AND HOLLYWOOD

As much as I enjoyed Daniel Zalewski's profile of Werner Herzog, I was surprised not to find a reference to Zak Penn's 2004 film, "Incident at Loch Ness," an ersatz documentary co-written by Herzog ("The Ecstatic Truth," April 24th). It envisions the mercurial German director paired up with big-studio personnel and budgets to film what he thinks will be a typically Herzogian take on the elusive Nessie, but the film is soon corrupted by Hollywood conventions. All Herzog's travails in Thailand—the exasperated power struggles with producers, the problems with local labor, and the fundamental artistic disconnect between Herzog's methods and the formulaic strictures of an action movie—were eerily foreshadowed in "Incident." This leads me to wonder whether Herzog himself is not in on the joke with "Rescue Dawn"—how could he not have predicted what was going to happen?

Tom Vanderbilt
Brooklyn, N.Y.

●

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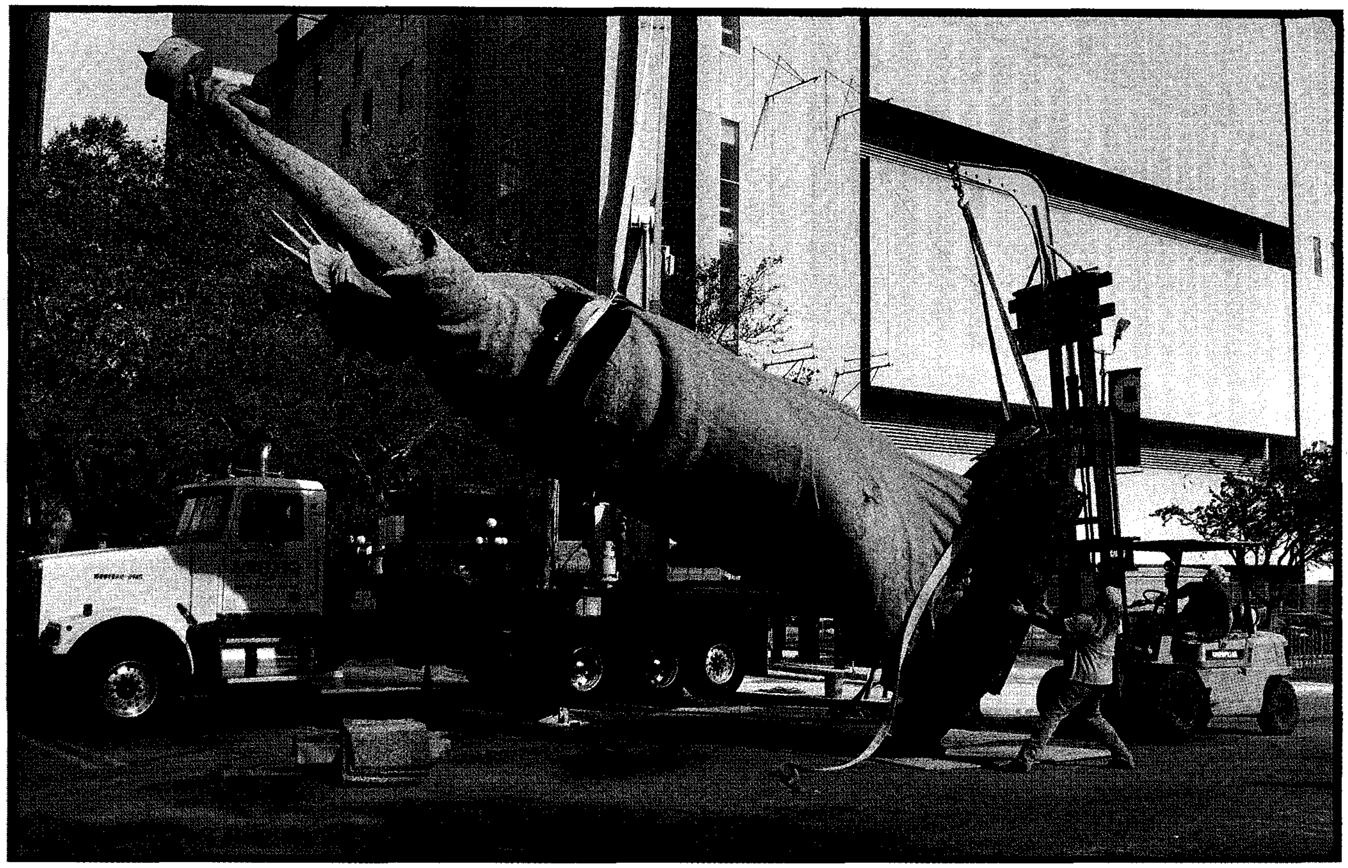
Bodhisattva; China; Tang (618–907), first half of the 8th century; Collection of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Nelson A. Rockefeller bequest, Kykuit. Photo: John Bigelow Taylor



The Brooklyn Museum's Statue of Liberty replica. Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
21	22	23	17	18	19	20

THIS WEEK

NIGHT LIFE
DYNAMIC DUO

Gnarls Barkley, the innovative hip-pop pairing of the producer Danger Mouse (who first gained renown for his "Grey Album," a full-length remix of Jay-Z's "Black Album" using only Beatles samples) and the Southern vocalist Cee Lo Green (formerly of Goodie Mob), made history recently when their single "Crazy" débuted atop the U.K. singles chart, even though it was only available as a download. The duo plays Webster Hall this week. (See page 12.)

ART
LIGHT FANTASTIC

Jenny Holzer, best known for her tremendous projections of poetic texts on buildings, is the subject of a two-gallery show in Chelsea. Cheim & Read's focus is on paintings made in 2005 and 2006, while Yvon Lambert's is on Holzer's pigment prints of her light projections; both shows deal with recently declassified government documents. (See page 15.)

DANCE
SAINT CHRISTOPHER

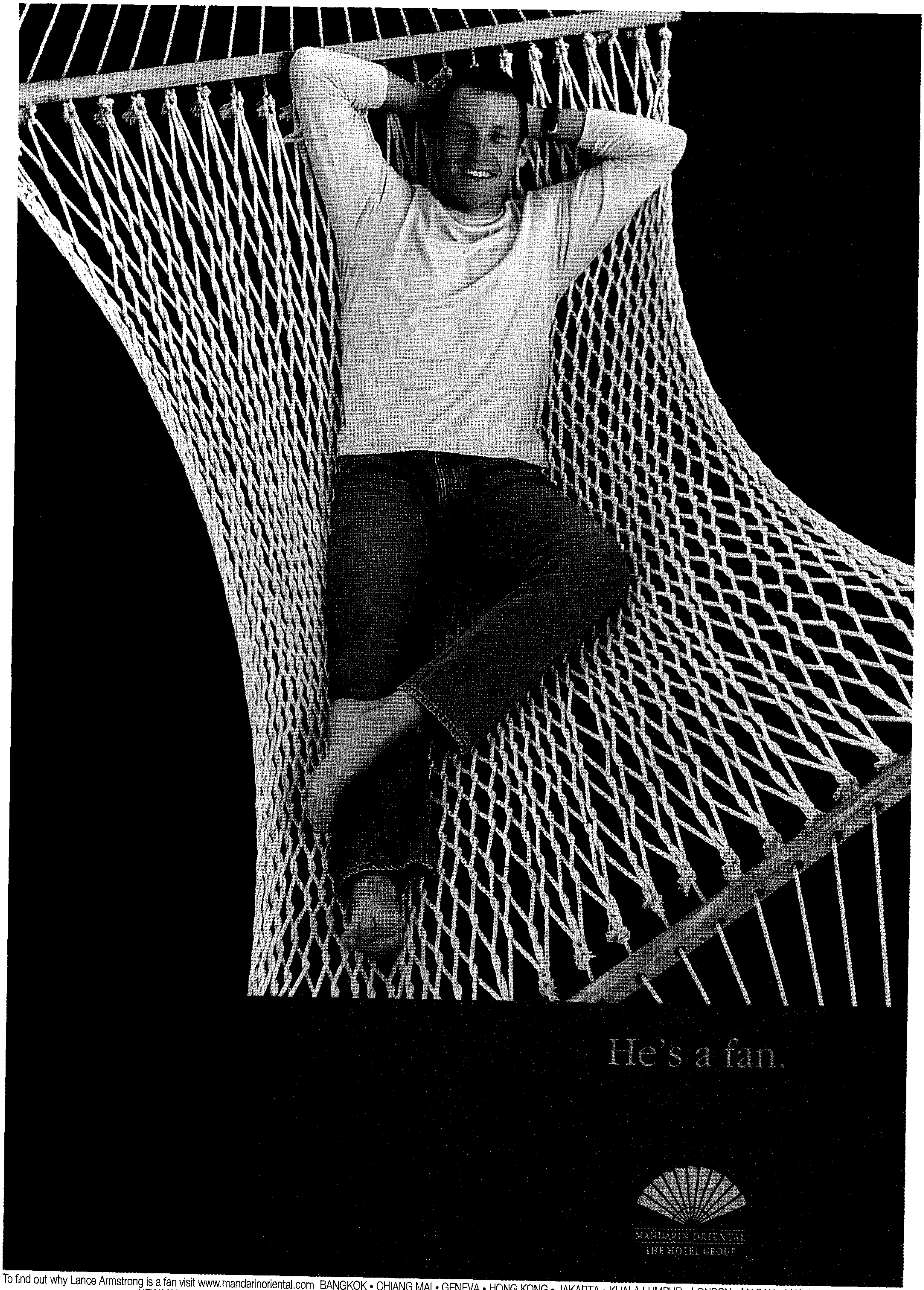
The intellectual young choreographer Christopher Williams, whose recent dances explore the lives of saints, has a new work, at Danspace. His "Portuguese Suite," set to fado songs, tackles the controversial subject of homosexuality in the Catholic community. (See page 16.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
CHORAL KINGDOM

A series of concerts offered by Voices of Ascension, the Dessoff Choirs, and the New Amsterdam Singers—performing music ranging from Tallis to Corigliano—highlight an exceptionally rich week for choral music. (See page 18.)

MOVIES
PARK CITY, NEW YORK

The second week of the "Sundance Institute at BAM" series features such notable unreleased films as "In Between Days," So Yong Kim's quiet drama about Korean-American teen-agers, and "Wristcutters: A Love Story," a comedy by Goran Dukic about a Dantean limbo for suicides. The series ends with a panel discussion with Allison Anders, Hal Hartley, David O. Russell, and John Waters. (See page 22.)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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

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BURLEIGH GRIME$
Wendie Malick and Mark Moses star in a new comedy by Roger Kirby, about a Wall Street up-and-comer. With music by David Yazbek. David Warren directs. Previews begin May 23. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

COLUMBINUS
This drama, conceived and directed by P. J. Paparelli, examines the psychology of American high-school students. In previews. Opens May 22. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

HERAKLES VIA PHAEDRA
Ellen Stewart's adaptation intertwines the two myths and sets them in the Roaring Twenties. Previews begin May 18. Opens May 21. (LaMama Annex, 74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710.)

LEE EVANS
The British comedian comes to 37 Arts with a new standup act. Previews begin May 19. (450 W. 37th St. 212-560-8912.)

NOT A GENUINE BLACK MAN
Brian Copeland's new play tells of his experiences in an African-American family living in an almost exclusively white suburb. Bob Balaban directs. Opens May 17. (DR2, 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE RACE
Gecko presents a highly physical theatre piece about a man preparing to meet his first child. Part of the "Brits Off Broadway" series. In previews. Opens May 18. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

SOME GIRL(S)
Maura Tierney, Eric McCormack, and Fran Drescher star in a new play by Neil LaBute, about a man who visits four former girlfriends before getting engaged. Directed by Jo Bonney. In previews. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

SPRING AWAKENING
Atlantic Theatre Company presents the world première of a new musical adapted from Frank Wedekind's novel about the secret lives of teen-agers. With music by Duncan Sheik and book and lyrics by Steven Sater. Michael Mayer directs. Previews begin May 18. (336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.)

TROUT STANLEY
The American première of a drama by Claudia Dey, about twin girls living in the Canadian wild. Jen Wineman directs. Previews begin May 19. Opens May 22. (Culture Project, 45 Bleecker St. 212-868-4444.)

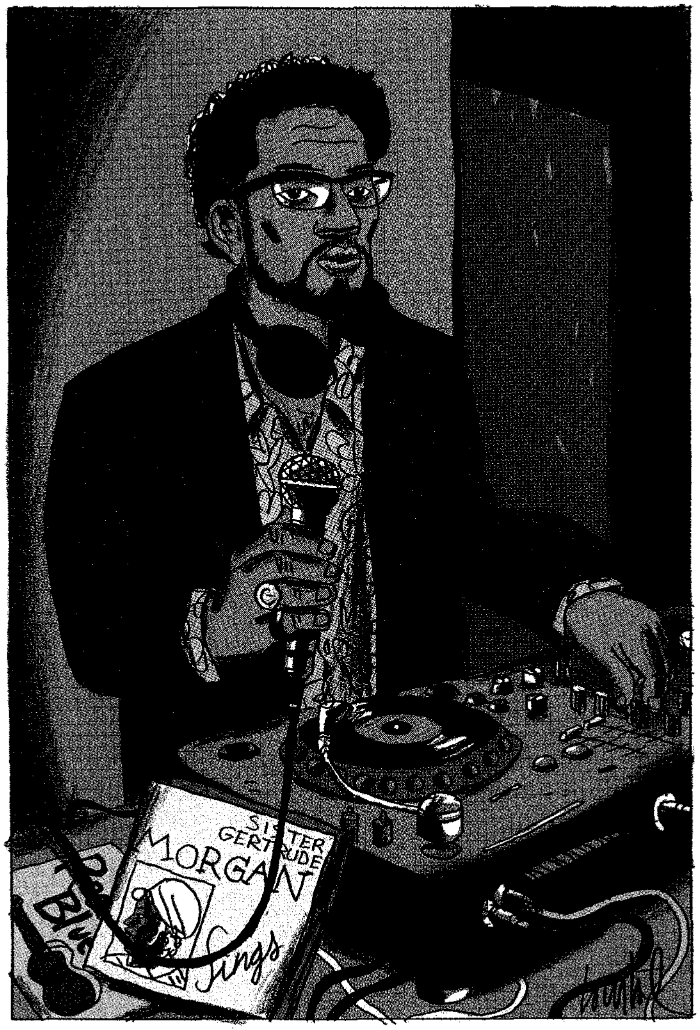
WAITING FOR GODOT
Classical Theatre of Harlem presents Samuel Beckett's masterpiece. Christopher McElroen directs. Previews begin May 18. Opens May 19. (HSA Theatre, 645 St. Nicholas Ave., near 141st St. 212-868-4444.)

THE WATER'S EDGE
Kate Burton, Tony Goldwyn, Mamie Gummer, Austin Lysy, and Katharine Powell star in a new play by Theresa Rebeck, in which a woman and her children are paid an unwelcome visit by her ex-husband. Directed by Will Frears. Previews begin May 23. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

NOW PLAYING

ALL DOLLED UP
Colin Quinn and Working Stiff Productions present a new comedy by Bobby Spillane, based on the true story of a cross-dressing gangster. Susan Campanaro directs. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

ANNULLA
Emily Mann's play tells the story of a Polish Jew who passed as an Aryan under the Nazi regime. (Theatre at St. Luke's, 308 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200.)



The d.j. and producer King Britt, at the Whitney.

JACQUES DE LOUSTAL

BILLY CONNOLLY LIVE!
The Scottish comedian presents a standup show at 37 Arts. (450 W. 37th St. 212-307-4100.)

BRUNDIBAR
The Tony Award-winning playwright Tony Kushner has done a lively job of translating Adolf Hoffmeister's 1938 libretto to this children's opera by the late Czech composer Hans Krása. The title character (brilliantly played by Euan Morton) is a small-town organ grinder whose main audience is children. But no amount of financial gain or audience attention can offset the fact that Brundibar dislikes his primary spectatorship. When Aninku (the charming, wise-beyond-her-years Devynn Pedell) and her brother, Pepicek (the strong Aaron Simon Gross), wander into the town where Brundibar holds sway, mayhem ensues, but we never lose sight of Hoffmeister and Krása's intention: to show the power of the community, and the grit to be found in hope. Maurice Sendak's beautiful sets add to the reality and the fairy-tale nature of it all. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. Through May 21.)

CAGELOVE
Christopher Denham wrote this drama, about a woman who charges her former lover with rape. Adam Rapp (the writer of "Red Light Winter") directs. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

THE CAINE MUTINY COURT-MARTIAL
It's a peculiar moment to revisit Herman Wouk's 1953 courtroom drama, based on his Pulitzer Prize-winning novel. The story is centered around a noble dissenter—a Second World War naval lieutenant (Joe Sikora) on trial for usurping his inept superior officer, Captain Queeg (Željko Ivanek), during a typhoon—but its conclusion, which argues against the questioning of military authority, can't help but resonate awkwardly in the age of Donald Rumsfeld. Most likely, the intention behind Jerry Zaks's revival was not to reinvent the play as a conservative guilt trip but to give David Schwimmer, who plays the defense attorney, a chance to show off his dramatic chops. As it turns out, he's upstaged by a crew of expert character actors, most notably Ivanek as the brittle Queeg. (Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE DROWSY CHAPERONE
This show, deftly directed and choreographed by Casey Nicholaw, happens to be the most original musical of the season. The minute the knowing, sad-sack narrator (Bob Martin, who also co-wrote the book with Don McKellar) puts on a record of Gable and Stein's "The Drowsy Chaperone"—"Remember?" he says of this entirely fictional 1928 musical comedy—his world is renovated. The musical takes place in his head, and the garish, glamorous stock characters—low comedians, ingénues, Latin lovers—make their entrance: the heroine of the musical within the musical, Janet Van De Graaff (the winning Sutton Foster), is quitting show business to marry the debonair hero, playfully named Robert Martin (Troy Britton Johnson). "The Drowsy Chaperone" cleverly deconstructs not just the folderol of twenties extravaganzas but also the frivolity of high camp. (Reviewed in our issue of 5/15/06.) (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100.)

FAITH HEALER
The subject of the four eloquent monologues on the paradox of talent that make up Brian Friel's "Faith Healer" (imported from Dublin to the Booth, under the elegant direction of Jonathan Kent) is the Irish faith healer Frank Hardy (Ralph Fiennes). Through their evasions, omissions, and confessions, Frank's speeches chart the trajectory of his self-destruction. Frank's wife, Grace (Cherry Jones), and his manager, Teddy (the superb Ian McDiarmid), are the other witnesses to the healings he calls his "performances"—and to the price they all pay for his occasional miracles. In Friel's brilliant storytelling, the refracted memories of the characters paint a harrowing picture of recrimination and self-aggrandizement, and Fiennes is outstanding, a compelling bundle of prowess and panic. (5/15/06) (222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

FAUST
David Herskovits directs Target Margin Theatre's production of parts one and two of Goethe's masterpiece. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 212-279-4200. Through May 20.)

J.A.P. CHRONICLES, THE MUSICAL
Isabel Rose wrote, composed, and stars in a one-woman musical version of her novel, which follows a group of Am Ex-wielding, engagement-ring-waving, Louis Vuitton-slinging JAPs—that's "Jewish American Powerhouses," thank you very much—who meet up at a summer-camp reunion. Rose, frenetic and likable no matter which character she in-

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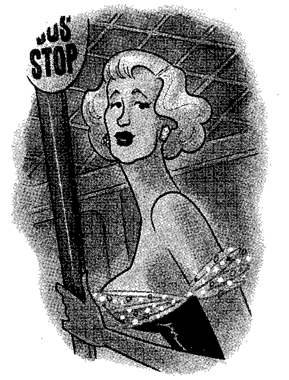
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
CURTAIN CALL

When the inimitable Kim Stanley died in 2001, she had not appeared on a New York stage in almost forty years. Using a mixture of the Method and her own imagination, Stanley—who also tore up the screen in "The Goddess" (1958), "Seance on a Wet Afternoon" (1964), and the 1964 Actor's Studio filmed production of "The Three Sisters"—was the first (and some say the best) Cherie



in William Inge's 1955 hit, "Bus Stop." Rumor has it that when Marilyn Monroe took the part on, she paid more heed to Stanley's version than she did to her own. The demons that pursued Stanley throughout most of her career—alcoholism, impossibly high standards—are given ample play in Jon Krampner's uneven but crucial new biography, "Female Brando." One is alternately amused and horrified by Stanley's avid pursuit to be the best and to throw away the crown, almost at once. Perhaps Elaine Stritch said it best when she remarked, at Stanley's memorial service at the Actor's Studio, "The problem with Kim—God bless her—is that for her it all got too goddam real."

—*Hilton Als*

habits, makes a good-faith effort to humanize these ladies who lunch even as she's sending them up, but her satirical acumen isn't sharp enough at the outset, and the piece, despite the best of orthodontics, doesn't have much bite. (Perry Street Theatre, 31 Perry St. 212-868-4444.)

NO CHILD
Nilaja Sun's one-woman show. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

SHINING CITY
Manhattan Theatre Club presents a new play by Conor McPherson ("The Weir"). (Reviewed in this issue.) (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

A SPALDING GRAY MATTER
While thirty-three-year-old Michael Brandt was visiting his parents in Lawrence, Kansas, a near-fatal case of bacterial pneumonia attacked his lungs. Later, the infection travelled to his knee, leaving him unable to walk. In a wry, carefully controlled monologue—so carefully controlled, in fact, that one senses the raw hurt beneath the clenched baritone—Brandt recounts his erratic and slow recovery, interposing his story with that of Spalding Gray, who vanished in New York while Brandt was fighting to regain his health in Kansas. Much in the tradition of Gray, Brandt proves himself an intense soloist, erring only in his tendency to overexplain his conclusions instead of allowing the audience to make the links themselves. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

TARZAN
Disney's version of Edgar Rice Burroughs's classic story comes to Broadway. Bob Crowley directs. (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747.)

THE THREE MUSKETEERS
The Acting Company presents a new stage adaptation of the Dumas novel. (Baruch Performing Arts Center, 55 Lexington Ave. 212-279-4200. Through May 20.)

TROIKA: GOD, TOLSTOY AND SOPHIA
This drama by Peter Levy tells of the last days of Leo Tolstoy. (13th Street Repertory, 50 W. 13th St. 212-352-3101.)

Also Playing

AVENUE Q: Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AWAKE AND SING!:** Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **BRIDGE & TUNNEL:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **CORTEO:** Randall's Island Park. 800-678-5440. **THE HISTORY BOYS:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **JACQUES BREL IS ALIVE AND WELL AND LIVING IN PARIS:** Zipper, 336 W. 37th St. 212-239-6200. **LANDSCAPE OF THE BODY:** Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-352-3101. **THE LIEUTENANT OF INISHMORE:** Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE LIGHT IN THE PIAZZA:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **MARY STUART:** Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802. Through May 21. **THE PAJAMA GAME:** American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. **RED LIGHT WINTER:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **STUFF HAPPENS:** Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200. **SWEENEY TODD:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **THREE DAYS OF RAIN:** Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE THREEPENNY OPERA:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300. **TRYST:** Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE:** Circle in the Square, 50th St. between Broadway and Eighth Ave. 212-239-6200. **THE WEDDING SINGER:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—May 17: The hip-hop acts **Naughty by Nature** and **Black Sheep** turn the clock back to the nineties, a decade that started off with Naughty's radio smash "O.P.P." and Black Sheep's hilarious début album, "A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing." May 19: The **Bacon Brothers** are the actor Kevin and his brother, Michael. Hollywood hangs like an albatross around the neck of any movie star turned musician, but this duo shakes off the burden of fame with sharply executed rock that has a blue-collar, rootsy edge. May 20: The **Charlie Daniels Band,** best known for the Faustian parable of Johnny Reb defiance, "The Devil Went Down to Georgia."

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—May 18-19: The former Television guitarist and singer **Tom Verlaine,** one of the pioneers of New York City punk rock, imbued his solos with lyrical simplicity. These days, in addition to sporadically reuniting his seminal band, Verlaine has a solo career. Here he'll present material from his two new albums, "Songs and Other Things" and the all-instrumental release "Around." May 23: When the lead singer of **Alice in Chains,** Layne Staley, succumbed to heroin addiction and died in 2002, many assumed it spelled the end of the grunge heavyweights' career. Four years later, however, the guitarist, Jerry Cantrell, has reassembled the surviving members and recruited a new vocalist, William DuVall (of Comes with the Fall).

HAMMERSTEIN BALLROOM
Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. (212-307-7171)—May 19-20: **Coheed & Cambria** demonstrate an unlikely combination of progressive-rock prowess and punk-rock intensity. The ambitious quartet specializes in complicated song titles, inventive arrangements, and high-pitched vocals that suggest an unhealthy intake of helium.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—May 19: The birthday celebration of the late lanky punk rocker Joey Ramone, who would have been fifty-five this year, is a hotly anticipated event for the leather-jacketed set. The lineup for this year's party includes **Wayne Kramer** (see Joe's Pub), **Glen Matlock's Philistines,** the **Alarm,** the **Star Spangles,** and the **Strokes.** May 20: The powerhouse soul singer **Sharon Jones** was born half a century ago in Augusta, Georgia (the birthplace of James Brown), and raised both there and in Brooklyn. In her youth she was a successful session vocalist, but she ended up working as a corrections officer in Rikers Island. She never gave up music, though, and after years performing in church, she returned to recording in 1996. Four years ago, she made her début with the Dap-Kings, a funk outfit featuring a sterling horn section. This show is in celebration of her fiftieth birthday, and it features that band and many guest musicians.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—May 18: The Lima, Peru, native **Susana Baca** visits with songs from her new album, "Travesias." May 20: The Detroit-born guitar hero **Wayne Kramer,** of the legendary proto-punks the MC5, drops by for his first-ever solo show in the U.S. Since the MC5 broke up, on New Year's Eve in 1972, Kramer has been a sideman for a wide cross-section of punk iconoclasts, including Johnny Thunders, Pere Ubu, and GG Allin. He's an exquisite musical craftsman with a tone that's as muscular and beautiful as a '68 Mustang. Though Kramer will be playing mostly acoustic songs that are surprisingly melodic, the subject matter is thoroughly gritty, as befits a Motor City native.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—May 18: The **Essex Green** traffics in the pop sounds of long ago. The Brooklyn trio's rollicking compositions are full of flutes, organs, tambourines, and groovy cheer. May 19: **Vic Thrill & the Saturn Missile** are an eccentric local act that eludes categorization with giddy dexterity. Their frantic, psychedelic songs are rife with jittery rhythms and strange electronic instrumentation. May 20-21: The singer-songwriter **Jesse Malin,** formerly of D Generation.

MO PITKIN'S HOUSE OF SATISFACTION
34 Avenue A, between 2nd and 3rd Sts. (212-777-5660)—May 18: The **Main Squeeze Orchestra** is an all-women accordion ensemble founded and led by Walter Kuhr, the proprietor of a Lower

MAURICE VELLEKOOP

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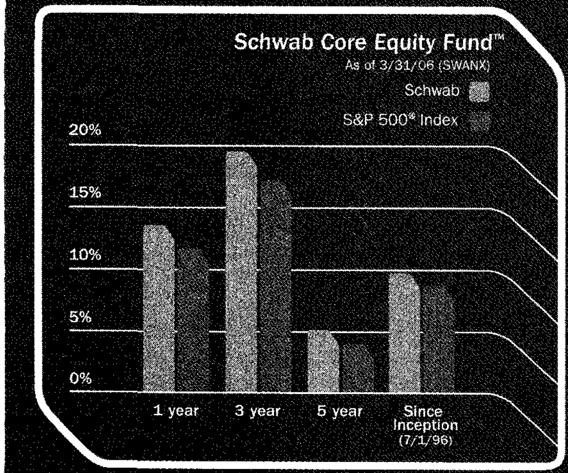

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East Side accordion shop. Saturdays: The **Murray Hill Show.** The self-described "hardest-working middle-aged man in show business" hosts a late-night variety show that draws talent (and celebrities) from far and wide.

NEW YORK SOCIETY FOR ETHICAL CULTURE
2 W. 64th St. (212-874-5210)—May 19: The synth-pop duo **Erasure** winds up its first acoustic tour.

NORTHSIX
66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-599-5103)—May 19: The local punk mainstays **Murphy's Law.** May 20: **Acid Mothers Temple,** an eccentric psychedelic collective from Japan, boldly experiments with sprawling, spacey fare. Its expansive compositions often risk turning into bad trips, but that hasn't stopped it from developing a cult audience here.

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—May 21: The **National,** a quintet of Ohio transplants who live in Brooklyn, play shimmering, au-courant indie rock. The band is tight, perhaps owing to the fact that it features a pair of siblings, and it has received plenty of well-deserved praise for its latest album, "Alligator." May 22: **Gnarls Barkley,** the duo of the producer Danger Mouse and the Atlanta performer Cee Lo Green, formerly of the group Goodie Mob, plays its first New York City show. On the pair's new album, "St. Elsewhere," Cee Lo's soulful voice is as rich as maple syrup and Danger Mouse matches its appeal with eclectic, slightly trippy beats that are always as catchy as they are humorous.

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—May 19: Sister Gertrude Morgan (1900-80) was a New Orleans treasure. A painter, poet, and singer, she roamed the French Quarter in a nurse's outfit, convinced that she was the bride of Christ. Sometime in the sixties, she cut an album of powerfully raw gospel songs accompanied only by her own tambourine playing. The house-music producer **King Britt,** once a key member of Digable Planets, recently remixed her singing on a propulsive release, "King Britt Presents Sister Gertrude Morgan." Here, he'll perform the material, accompanied by a cast of four and a multimedia projection incorporating Morgan's art.

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
May 18: A night of Ottoman classical music with the oud player **Munir Nurettin Beken,** a founding member of the State Turkish Music Ensemble. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St.) May 20: **Zakir Hussain's** "Masters of Percussion." The legendary tabla player performs solo and in collaboration with noted artists, including **Manipuri Jagoi Marup,** the dancing drummers of Manipur. The sarangi player **Ustad Sultan Khan** and the sitarist **Niladri Kumar** will also be on hand. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. For more information, call 212-545-7536.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Starting May 16: The vocalist **Andrea Marcovicci** opens an all-request show.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—May 17-20: **Ben Riley's Monk Legacy Septet.** A Thelonious Monk tribute band without a pianist? Trust the trumpeter, arranger, and general conceptualist Don Sickler to ably score Monk's masterpieces for four horns and a guitar. With the Monk-band veteran Riley on the drums, swing is a given.

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—Through June 3: The British vocal stylist **Maria Friedman** takes the stage in the Café Carlyle for a program of Stephen Sondheim songs. ♦ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, **Loston Harris** is in attendance.

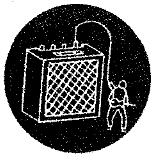
DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—May 16-21: The veteran singer **Ernestine Anderson,** backed by the **Juilliard Jazz Orchestra,** pays tribute to Duke Ellington.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—May 18-21: A bona-fide deity to the fusion cognoscenti and an early pioneer of the guitar synthesizer, **Allan Holdsworth** has played with everyone from Soft Machine to Tony Williams, rewriting the rules of the six-string game along the way. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—May 16-21: The Canadian expat pianist **Renee Rosnes** has frequently been heard with large ensembles, including the Carnegie Hall Jazz Orchestra, the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, and the Danish Radio Big Band, but here the inquisitive post-bop improviser takes charge of a sleek quartet. The saxophonist **Steve Wilson,** the bassist **Peter Washington,** and the drummer **Bill Stewart** join her. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

POP NOTES

AFTER ALL THESE YEARS



The title of **"Surprise"** (Warner Bros.), Paul Simon's tenth solo album, would have been appropriate for any of his records of the past twenty years. "Graceland" fused rock and roll with South African *mbqanga*, to great effect. "The Rhythm of the Saints" touched down in Brazil; "Songs from the Capeman," Puerto Rico. The surprise this time is that Simon isn't globe-trotting (or, as critics would have it, carpetbagging) in search of new sounds. But he hasn't stopped exploring, either—it's just that this time, his restlessness has been subcontracted to Brian Eno, who is credited with creating the "sonic landscape."

Simon's songs have always been about their rhythms—the Latin percussion of "Late in the Evening," the reggae of "Mother and Child Reunion"—and Eno, whether with Talking Heads or on his own, has spent his career perfecting a cerebral brand of funk. He's a strong presence here, outfitting "Everything About It Is a Love Song" with a skittering dance beat and using slide guitar and pointillistic keyboards to build "That's Me." The soundscapes are conspicuous enough that they would be distracting if applied to weaker songs. But Simon remains the most intelligent songwriter of his generation—not the most powerful or the most profound, but the one best able to communicate the romantic and philosophical intricacies of modern life. "I Don't Believe" starts off gentle before erupting into a verse that somehow turns financial panic into a lyrical experience: "I got a call from my broker / The broker informed me I'm broke / I was dealing my last hand of poker / My cards were useless as smoke." "Beautiful" is a bittersweet comedy about a family that adopts children from the world's trouble spots. And the old crank who narrates "Outrageous" may still be physically fit—he does nine hundred sit-ups a day—but he's unable to endure the ordinary world. As with every Paul Simon record, there are plenty of quirky rhymes (intuition/fishing, bridge/fridge) yoked to big questions.

When the pace slows down, pretension sometimes sets in: "Wartime Prayers" has a beautiful melody and sentiment, but it meanders more than Simon's grand ballads ("American Tune," for example) once did. But most of the time, there's a sense of both maturity and rejuvenation. As Simon sings on "How Can You Live in the Northeast?," the album's opener, "I've been given all I wanted / Only three generations off the boat / I have harvested and I've planted / I am wearing my father's old coat."

—*Ben Greenman*

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"The Art of Betty Woodman,"** a retrospective of ceramic pieces from throughout the artist's career. Through July 30. ♦ **"Cai Guo-Qiang on the Roof: Transparent Monument."** The roof garden has reopened for the summer, with four sculptural works by the Chinese-born artist. Among them are "Clear Sky Black Cloud," a timed gunpowder explosion that will produce a small cloud of smoke over Central Park each day at noon. Through Oct. 29. ♦ **"Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharaoh."** Through July 9. ♦ **"Samuel Palmer: Vision and Landscape."** A major retrospective of the Romantic-era landscape painter Samuel Palmer (1805-81). Through May 29. ♦ The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and forgotten items from the Met's storerooms meet in Kara Walker's sad and delicate show, **"After the Deluge."** Walker's own gruesomely satirical silhouettes, gouaches, and writings are mixed with a range of historical works to produce a meditation on death by water and the indelible stain of American racial obsessions. Through July 30. ♦ **"Anglo-Mania: Tradition and Transgression in British Fashion"** fills the English period galleries with mannequins dressed in costumes old and new, transforming the rooms into elaborate surreal tableaux. Mods mingle with dandies at a hunt ball, punks mix it up with dames in a drawing room, and the show as a whole conveys the interconnectedness and the bizarreness of both class and fashion. Through Sept. 4. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—In **"Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking,"** artists from Islamic backgrounds examine their cultures and homelands, mostly from afar. Unexpectedly, perhaps, women reign. Included are works by Mona Hatoum, Shahzia Sikander, Emily Jacir, and Marjane Satrapi. Through May 22. ♦ **"Against the Grain: Contemporary Art from the Edward R. Broida Collection."** Broida donated a hundred and seventy-five works to MOMA before his death, this year, more than half of which are on display in the museum's contemporary galleries. Four artists—Vija Celmins, Ken Price, Philip Guston, and Christopher Wilmarth—earn their own single-room examinations. Through July 10. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—Selections from the permanent collection are on display. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—Philippe Vergne and Chrissie Iles curated **"Day for Night,"** the 2006 Biennial. More than a hundred artists are represented, including Pierre Huyghe, Marilyn Minter, Sturtevant, and Troy Brauntuch. Through May 28. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

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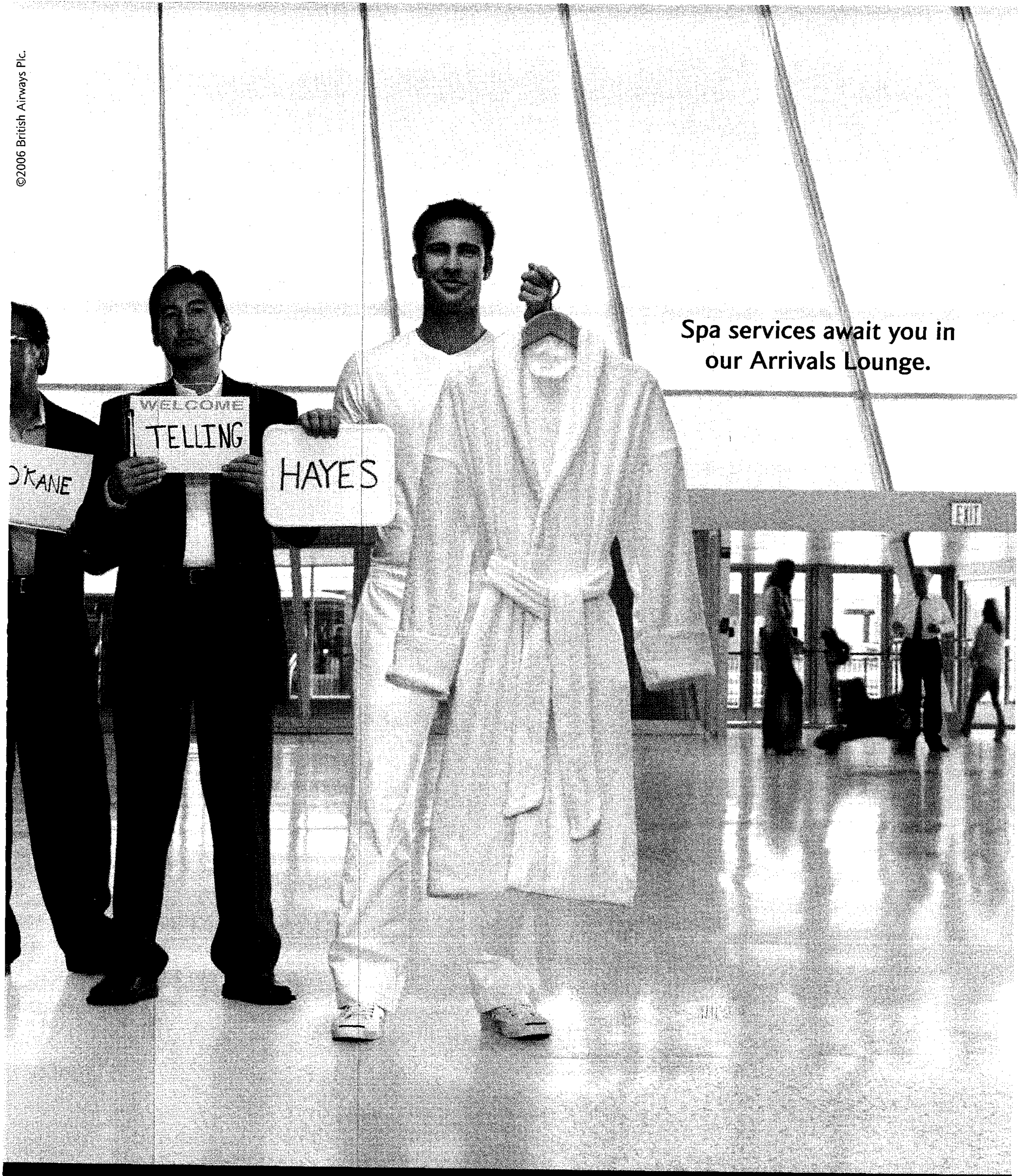
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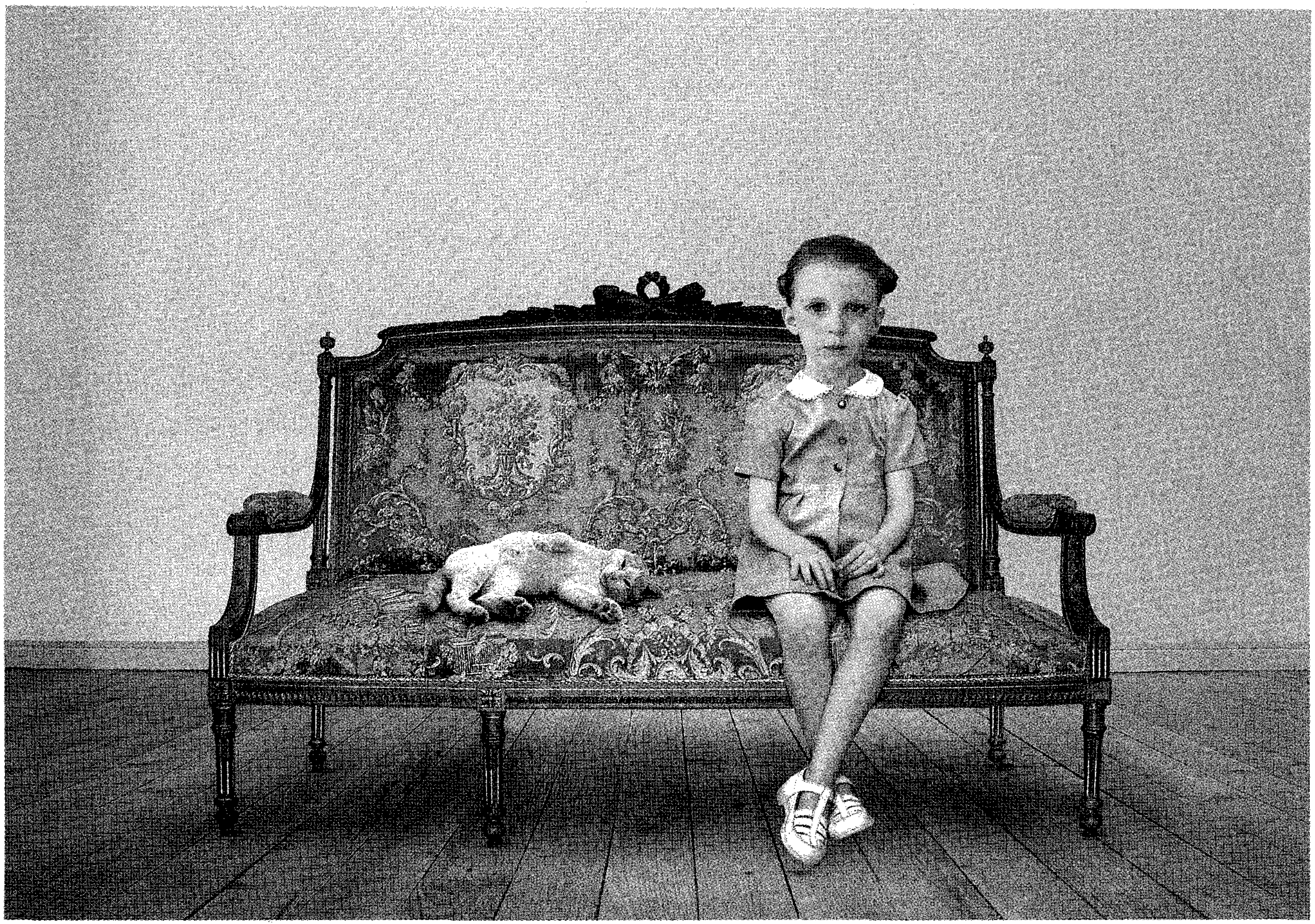

"The Waiting Girl, 2006," from a show of new digitally manipulated photographic work by Loretta Lux, at Yossi Milo.

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"William Wegman: Funney/Strange."** This major retrospective goes beyond clever, anthropomorphic photographs of Weimaraners (though those are here, too) with forty years of the artist's paintings, drawings, videos, and films. Through May 28. ♦ **"Symphonic Poem: The Art of Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson."** Through Aug. 13. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Darwin"** traces the discoveries and influence of the great naturalist (1809-82) with, among other things, a re-creation of his study, samples of fossils he collected, and live specimens of tortoises, frogs, and iguanas like those that he encountered in the Galápagos Islands. Through Aug. 20. ♦ **"The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter."** Through May 29. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

DAHESH MUSEUM OF ART
580 Madison Ave., at 57th St. (212-759-0606)—**"Stories to Tell: Masterworks from the Kelly Collection of American Illustration"** gathers original paintings and prints, as well as printed matter, featuring the beguiling visions of Maxfield Parrish, N. C. Wyeth, Charles Dana Gibson, Jessie Willcox Smith, and, naturally, Norman Rockwell. Through May 21. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

DRAWING CENTER
35 Wooster St. (212-219-2166)—**"Eva Hesse Drawing"** opens a window onto the sculptor's brief but influential career via working sketches, reliefs, and notes. Through July 15. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 to 6, and Saturdays, 11 to 6.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Eva Hesse: Sculpture,"** a major retrospective focussing on the artist's large-scale latex and fibreglass works. Through Sept. 17. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, Thursdays, 11 to 9, and Fridays, 11 to 3. For the duration of the Hesse show, the museum will also be open on Saturdays, from 11 to 5:45, with no charge for admission.)

MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—The midtown oasis has reopened after almost three years of renovation and a Renzo Piano expansion. It marks the occasion with **"Masterworks from the Morgan,"** a selection of manuscripts, drawings, books, and seals from the collections. Manuscripts in the Brontë siblings' tiny handwriting, a libretto of "Aida" annotated by Verdi, and Picasso's pen-and-ink portrait of Marie-Thérèse Walter are among the items on display. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

TIBET HOUSE
22 W. 15th St. (212-807-0563)—The children's-book artist Rima Fujita exhibits watercolors, drawings, prints, and paintings filled with smiling multi-armed spirits, bejewelled little girls floating in azure skies, and almond-eyed monks clustered around stupas that look like birthday cakes. Among the works on view are original drawings from "Wonder Garden: A Tale of an Old Dog and a Baby Rabbit," Fujita's telling of a traditional Tibetan story, which was published with a joint foreword by the Dalai Lama and Robert Thurman, the foremost American scholar of Tibetan Buddhism and the president of Tibet House. Through June 16. (Open Mondays through Fridays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

JAMES LEE BYARS
A festival of Byars work is on view in six spaces belonging to three galleries around the city. Cynics might call it a market grab, a venture to raise Byars's values following his diminutive retrospective at the Whitney last year—but the real beneficiaries are lovers of art with a playful, feather-light touch. Venetian blown-glass balls are arranged in a delicate arabesque on the floor at Werner. Gilded marble columns stand at quiet attention, along with performance relics like a cascading American flag and a podium for blowing kisses, at Rubenstein. At Boone, a giant amphora turned on its side becomes "The Spinning Oracle of Delphi." Throughout, minimalism is cut with Eastern philosophy and tricksterish pranks, like turning antique pottery into a prop for spin the bottle. Through June 24. (Michael Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 212-988-1623; see also Chelsea Short List.)

WILLEM DE KOONING
One of the hallmarks of de Kooning's work was its epic battle between restraint and release. This suite of paintings from a three-year period in the seventies (1975-78) demonstrates the victory of the latter. Here, slashing brushstrokes aren't put to the service of describing figures or carefully excavated shapes. Instead, the artist abandoned himself to shocking, unbound passages of orange, cerulean, and crimson. Several canvases explore the range of flesh tones in their palette, furthering the rhyme between the "skin" of painted canvas and bodies. All are untitled, save one filled with electrically squiggly brushstrokes called "Screams of Children Come from Seagulls," a hint, perhaps, of the aural atmosphere of East Hampton, where all of these were painted. Through June 3. (L&M, 45 E. 78th St. 212-861-0020.)

JUAN MUÑOZ
The centerpiece of Muñoz's exhibition, a survey of his last fifteen years (the artist died in 2001), is a pileup of train cars cast in dusky Corten steel, the material favored by Richard Serra. The scale of "Derailment" falls somewhere between toy and life-size trains (the body is copied from a plastic model of a high-speed train), and its style is mid-

way between realism and boxlike minimalism. Inside the cars, rather than seats, are the welded skeletons of city architecture: buildings, promenades, and balconies. Elsewhere, a floor fitted with rich wooden tiles merges the notion of painting and interior design, and theatrical figures in the George Segal mode enact Beckettian scenarios, laughing at unknown jokes and grimacing at invisible terrors. "Derailment," however, with its dark allusions, simple composition, and poetic interior, steals the show. Through June 10. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160.)

MATTHEW PILLSBURY
These contemporary, black-and-white spirit photos are the results of long exposures that render anything human and in motion as apparitional blurs. Typically, Pillsbury's subject or subjects (in several cases here, himself and his lover) are in a room facing a computer or watching a TV whose blank screen glows like a science-fiction portal to infinity. As if the screens had the power to absorb their viewers' essences, the figures in these pictures are transparent and ephemeral ghosts grappling on a couch or perched as insubstantially as fog on a chair. Pillsbury shows these intriguingly intimate scenes alongside equally mysterious but more predictable views of milling crowds at natural-history museums or consumer fairs. Through May 27. (Benrubi, 41 E. 57th St. 212-888-6007.)

Short List

ANTONI TÀPIES: PaceWildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 212-421-3292. Through June 3. **"THE BIG EASY IN THE BIG APPLE":** AXA, 787 Seventh Ave., at 51st St. 212-554-4818. Through May 20.

GALLERIES-CHELSEA

YTO BARRADA
Barrada, a French-Moroccan artist whose work is also included in the I.C.P.'s survey of contemporary African photography, "Snap Judgments," shows large-scale color photos from an ongoing series about Tangier and its thwarted relationship with Europe, symbolized by the tantalizingly narrow but forbidding Strait of Gibraltar. The conceptual underpinnings of the project may not be apparent in every picture, but each image has genuine heft, and the cumulative impact of the work—a sense of isolation and stagnation—is substantial. Barrada also focusses on the beauty potential immigrants would leave behind: the wall one woman faces is a riot of decorative tile work. Through May 30. (Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793.)

GUY BEN-NER
A Sartre quote about the child acting as a lone agent serves as an epigram and metaphor for the artist in "Berkeley's Island," a video that finds Ben-Ner "stranded" in his apartment's kitchen on a mound of sand planted with a palm tree. Using whatever materials are at hand, the artist/castaway spends his time crafting objects and making a puppet of his penis. The sculpture and video installation "Treehouse Kit" toys with the same ideas of ad-hoc materials and art as play. Here the artist constructs a dwelling from disassembled furniture and climbs up in it. The spindly tree house itself isn't remarkable but serves adequately as performance relic—and as another version of Ben-Ner's portrait of the artist as a dexterous charmer-cum-bumbling savant. Through May 20. (Postmasters, 459 W. 19th St. 212-727-3323.)

BRUCE GILDEN
Known for his high-impact street work, Gilden shows eleven knockout photos taken in Tokyo and Osaka over the recent turn of the century. Big, brutal, and aggressively black-and-white, the work looks like a paparazzo version of Daido Moriyama. Thugs, mobsters, drunks, bums, and one comically tragic drag queen—all larger than life—populate a noir underworld frozen by Gilden's flash into a waxworks diorama. In one picture, a man getting his hair dyed is laid out like a corpse, black liquid dripping from his head onto a sheet of newspaper as if in a bizarre crime scene. Through June 3. (Silverstein, 535 W. 24th St. 212-627-3930.)

JUDY GLANTZMAN
There's a religious quality to Glantzman's paintings with their multitudes of bodiless heads floating in ethereal formations. Her canvases are like contemporary versions of the Last Judgment, packed with figures hovering over an abyss, or the sculptural doorjambs of Gothic cathedrals, encrusted with figures representing the community of Christians. Only Glantzman's are modern faces, smudged and uncertain, and her acid palette recalls Ensor and the Symbolists rather than the Old Masters, with occasional figures disintegrating in the Existentialist tradition of Francis Bacon. Grimacing gargoyles molded out of polymer Sculpey and outfitted with clownish hats and ruff collars further the Ensor allusion and the idea of humanity as a dazed and confused carnival of souls. Through May 26. (Cuningham, 541 W. 25th St. 212-242-2772.)

BILL HENSON
Henson's version of teen-age lust is nearly as obsessive as Larry Clark's but a lot more theatrical. In his latest series of enormous color photographs, the blue-tinged lighting suggests the artifice of day-for-night film and leaves his pubescent subjects in melodramatic shadow. Most of these boys and girls—some vaguely androgynous, several naked—appear to be adrift in a semi-suburban nowheresville that looks less than Edenic in the landscapes here but still provides a kind of anything-goes sanctuary. Or is it just another dead end? Henson has been here before, to more devastating effect. Now he needs to find his way out. Through June 3. (Robert Miller, 524 W. 26th St. 212-366-4774.)

JULIA JACQUETTE / MARY ANN STRANDELL
Luxe décor magazines—"house porn," as they are sometimes called—offer more than just guilty pleasure for Jacquette and Strandell. The two painters' shows, separate but linked, could be consecutive photo spreads edited by different designers. Jacquette's hyperrealist oils palpitate with chandeliers, crystal vases, satiny wood, and upholstery. Presumably we are meant to observe these fetishes of opulence fixation from an ironic distance, but they aren't really any weirder than their sources. Strandell's paintings are more interesting—California modernist bungalows rendered in gummy, dirty pastel, with grossly enlarged bits of chinoiserie splashed across them like kitschy household gods. Through May 20. (Steinberg, 526 W. 26th St. 212-924-5770.)

TOM MEACHAM / GARY STEPHAN / CHERYL DONEGAN / STEPHANIE CAMPOS
The gallery artists Meacham and Donegan each choose another artist with whom to show. Stephan makes the small, self-consciously cruddy bits of sculpture laid out on a tabletop. Hard-edged abstraction in heavy, creamy impasto belongs to Campos, while the thinner, looser but still jagged paintings (and the one enamelled with silver tape) are Donegan's. Meacham contributes two more geometric abstractions, and the show's only figurative moment—a small ink-jet print of a soldier who appears to have marched in from another world. Through May 20. (Kamm, 621 W. 27th St. 212-255-0979.)

Short List

JAMES LEE BYARS: Rubenstein, 527 W. 23rd St., 526 W. 24th St., and 534 W. 24th St. 212-627-8000; and Mary Boone, 541 W. 24th St. 212-752-2929. Through June 24. **JENNY HOLZER:** Lambert, 564 W. 25th St. 212-242-3611; and Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727. Through June 17. **LORETTA LUX:** Milo, 525 W. 25th St. 212-414-0370. Opens May 18. **RICHARD SERRA:** Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111. Through Aug. 11. **BETTY WOODMAN:** Protetch, 511 W. 22nd St. 212-633-6999. Through May 27.

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Q. & A.
Malcolm Gladwell talks about what canine behavior can teach us about human behavior.

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A calendar of New Yorker events across the country.

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
THREE-SIDE STORY

Since it stormed the Venice Film Festival, in 1951, Akira Kurosawa's "Rashomon" has lodged in the cinematic pantheon. But how accurate is our memory of a work that is itself a study of unreliable narration? A chance to find out comes at the IFC Center, where it will be shown from May 19 to May 21 as part of a Kurosawa retrospective. Toshiro Mifune plays a bandit who is accused of raping a woman and killing her husband; it is the sequence of those events, and the murkiness of the motives behind them, that grows increasingly hard to decipher. From such uncertainty, it is said, spring all the contortions of modern storytelling, yet one could argue that "Citizen Kane" was more eloquent on the slipperiness of truth. (As for Mifune, his performance now feels overwrought, spiked with manic laughter and unprompted writhings.) What has endured is Kurosawa's mastery of mood: the sylvan violence, shot with a dappled brightness, and, richer still, the bleakness of the narrators' surroundings—a broken temple, swept by apocalyptic rain.

—*Anthony Lane*

TARA HARDY

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET

There are no premières this week, but three recently unveiled ballets (by Wheeldon, Bigonzetti, and Martins) are sprinkled among such repertory classics as Balanchine's "Concerto Barocco," "Symphony in C," and the romantic "Liebeslieder Walzer" (set to Brahms waltzes), as well as Jerome Robbins's thematically similar "In the Night" (set to Chopin nocturnes). Three different takes on American attitude are also on display, from the faux naïveté of the American abroad ("An American in Paris," by Wheeldon, set to the famous Gershwin score) to the youthful cool of nineteen-fifties New York, à la "West Side Story" ("N.Y. Export: Opus Jazz," by Robbins) and the poignant exuberance of sailors on shore leave ("Fancy Free," also by Robbins, set to Bernstein's brilliant score). ♦ May 17 at 7:30: "Monumentum pro Gesualdo," "Movements for Piano and Orchestra," "In Vento," and "Brahms-Schoenberg Quartet." ♦ May 18 at 8: "Concerto Barocco," "Duo Concertant," "Intermezzo," and "An American in Paris." ♦ May 19 at 8: "Concerto Barocco," "Liebeslieder Walzer," and "An American in Paris." ♦ May 20 at 2: "Songs of the Auvergne," "In the Night," and "Symphony in C." ♦ May 20 at 8: "Evenfall," "The Red Violin," and "Liebeslieder Walzer." ♦ May 21 at 3: "Brahms-Schoenberg Quartet," "Monumentum pro Gesualdo," "Movements for Piano and Orchestra," and "N.Y. Export: Opus Jazz." ♦ May 23 at 7:30: "Monumentum pro Gesualdo," "Movements for Piano and Orchestra," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," "Evenfall," and "Fancy Free." (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. Through June 25.)

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE

This season, the company will unveil an Art Deco "Cinderella" by James Kudelka, as well as John Cranko's 1965 version of "Jeu de Cartes," a ballet as poker game that will be performed as part of an all-Stravinsky program. For Julio Bocca's final season with the company, A.B.T. has revived Kenneth MacMillan's "Manon," the story of a rapacious and ill-fated young woman and the unfortunate chevalier who loves her, set to the ardent music of Jules Massenet. "Giselle," "Swan Lake," "Romeo and Juliet," and last year's delightful "Sylvia" return, as does "Le Corsaire," an eminently silly (and fun) tale of pirates and slave girls, an ideal showcase for the company's many wonderful male dancers. At the opening-night gala, Bocca will dance (for the only time this season) José Limón's beautifully austere solo "Chaconne"; there will also be a guest appearance by the soprano Ruth Ann Swenson in a pièce d'occasion by the artistic director Kevin McKenzie (danced by Stella Abrera and Gennadi Saveliev) as well as a series of highlights from the season. ♦ May 22 at 6:30 (gala): Harvest Dance from "Giselle," "Other Dances," pièce d'occasion, "Le Corsaire" (Suite), "Manon" (Act II Solo and Adagio), "Apollo" (Pas de Deux), "Swan Lake" (Act III Pas de Deux), "Chaconne," "Sylvia" (Act III Pas de Deux and Coda). ♦ May 23 at 8: "Le Corsaire." (Metropolitan Opera House, Lincoln Center. 212-362-6000. Through July 15.)

MOMIX

Having spent years defying the laws of musculature, Momix's artistic director, Moses Pendleton, takes a swing at the laws of gravity in the troupe's latest hit, "Lunar Sea." Under black lights, the glow-in-the-dark dancers appear to float, their body parts occasionally detaching and drifting off. Pendleton strikes a mood somewhere between a New Age circus, a rock-and-roll laser light show, and a psychedelic dream, keeping the crowd teetering between awe and how-did-they-do-that curiosity. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. May 17-19 and May 23 at 8, May 20 at 2 and 8, and May 21 at 2 and 7:30. Through May 28.)

CHRISTOPHER WILLIAMS

The gifted choreographer's new "Portuguese Suite," presented by Danspace, examines the plight of homosexual lovers in traditional Catholic society. But don't expect polemics. Instead, Williams taps all of the mottled emotion in the fado recordings of Amália Rodrigues's hair-pulling anguish, an ennobling resignation to fate. Setting two male lovers against a chorus of wailing women, Williams draws intelligently on the poetry of the lyrics, fashioning iconic poses and open-chested, deeply musical dancing. The program also includes two excerpts from Williams's acclaimed lives-of-the-saints portrait collection, "Ursula and the 11,000 Virgins," along with three solos from that work's male counterpart, "The Golden Legend" (performed by John Kelly, Aaron Mattocks, and Chris Elam). The early-music ensembles Lionheart and the Anonymous 4 sing live. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. May 18-21 at 8:30.)

"BLACK DANCE: TRADITION AND TRANSFORMATION"

In a shared program, Reggie Wilson and Shani Collins revisit similarly themed work. Wilson has reconstructed two duets from the early nineties: "Jumping the Broom" follows a man and a woman as they meet, marry, and split up. "The Dew Wet" traces a couple's tribulations more abstractly; originally a male-female duet, here it is danced by two men. Collins's "But Some of Us Are Brave" sets a trio of women on the auction block, and uses spoken word, a Nina Simone song, and video to explore the black-female image. In "Goddess Subdued," the women act catty in a confined space, covering each other's ears and mouths, until they become conscious of oppression outside themselves. (Kumble Theatre, Flatbush Ave. between DeKalb Ave. and Willoughby St., Brooklyn. 718-488-1624. May 19 at 8.)

"IN OUR BLOOD: A LEGACY OF DANCE IN THE BRONX"

At the Lehman Center for the Performing Arts, a Sunday-afternoon concert honors the wide-ranging work of four charismatic choreographers from the Bronx. Jawole Willa Jo Zollar's folklore-inspired contemporary dance is performed by her Urban Bush Women, while Chuck Davis's work is danced by both his eponymous company and Dance Africa. Eddie (the Mambo King) Torres directs and performs with his Latin Dance Ensemble, and the break-dance guru Crazy Legs leads the Rock Steady Crew. (Lehman College. 718-960-8833. May 21 at 3.)

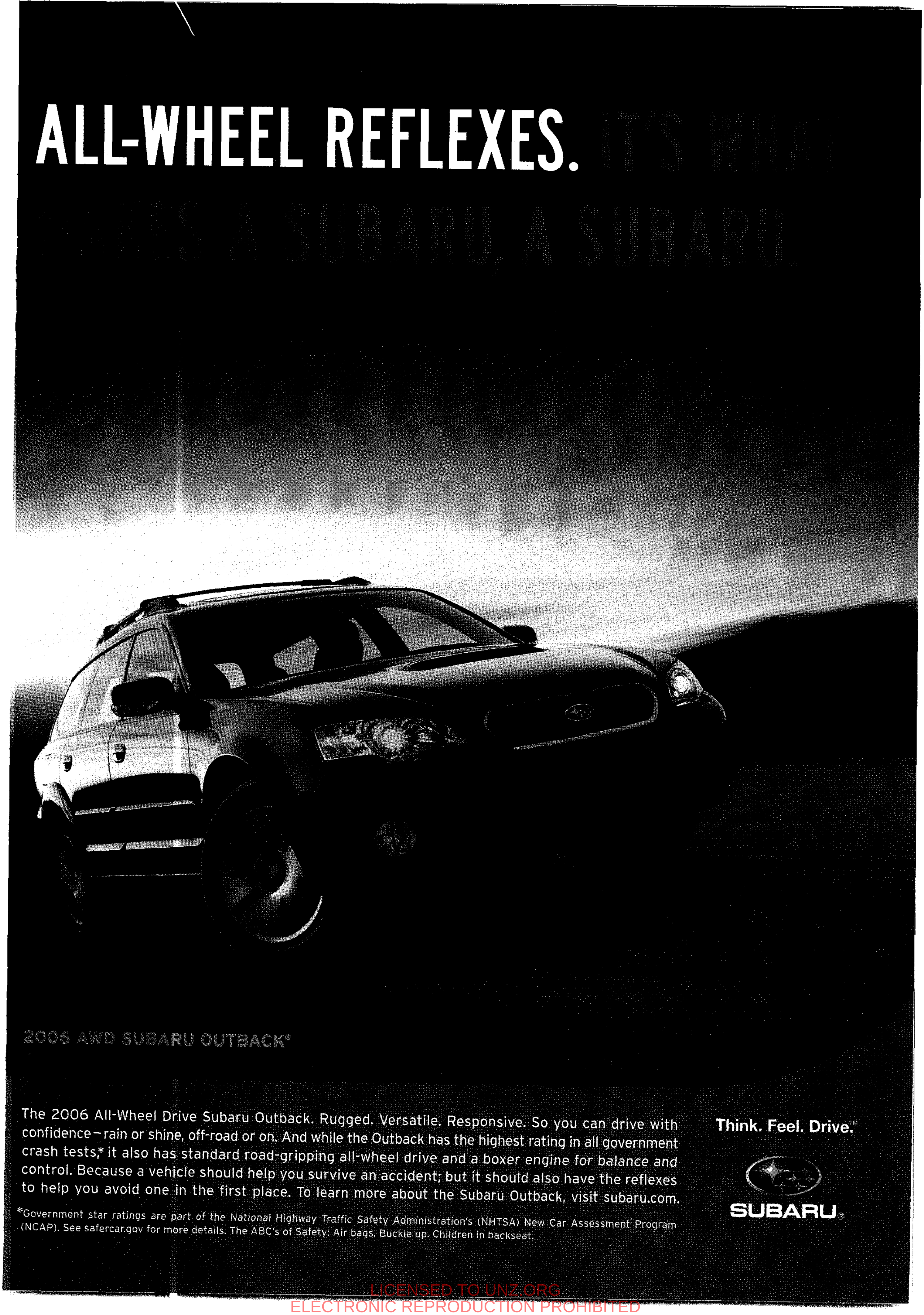
"WORKS & PROCESS"

Two choreographers from New York City Ballet's "Diamond Project" series, Jean-Pierre Bonnefoux and Jorma Elo, discuss their work with Peter Martins, the company's artistic director, and excerpts of two new works are performed by N.Y.C.B. dancers. Bonnefoux, the director of the North Carolina Dance Theatre, discusses the ballet he made for Sofiane Sylve and Sébastien Marcovici (and a corps of twelve), set to three pieces by the Chinese-born composer Bright Sheng, N.Y.C.B.'s composer-in-residence. Elo, currently at the Boston Ballet, talks about his ballet for eight dancers, set to music by Von Biber and Vivaldi. Both sessions are sold out, but there will be a standby list at the door. (Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3500. May 21-22 at 8.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA

The house offers its final performances of the season. May 17 at 7:30 and May 20 at 12:30: John Copley's picture-postcard production of **"L'Elisir d'Amore,"** once a vehicle for the Nemorino of Luciano Pavarotti, is now a platform for the Adina of Ruth Ann Swenson. Giuseppe Filianoti, Peter Coleman-Wright, and Alessandro Corbelli complete the cast; Maurizio Barbacini conducts. ♦ May 18 at 6:30: If you should happen to have five and a half hours free, you could do worse than to take in the Otto Schenk production of **"Parsifal,"** for which the Met has assembled the



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best of all possible casts: Ben Heppner, Waltraud Meier, Nikolai Putilin, Thomas Hampson, and René Pape, all eminent Wagnerians, take the leading roles, under the guidance of the respected Wagner conductor Peter Schneider. ♦ May 19 at 7:30: Stephen Wadsworth's vivid production of Handel's **"Rodelinda"** makes a triumphant return to the Met, with Renée Fleming, Andreas Scholl, Stephanie Blythe, Kobie van Rensburg, and John Relyea turning in superb performances; Patrick Summers leads a sympathetic accompaniment from the pit. ♦ May 20 at 5:30: The Met gives Joseph Volpe, its bare-knuckled general manager, a high-class gala sendoff in which nearly *every important singer today—including* Olga Borodina, Natalie Dessay, Juan Diego Flórez, Plácido Domingo, Renée Fleming, Mirella Freni, Thomas Hampson, Susan Graham, Karita Mattila, René Pape, Kiri Te Kanawa, and Frederica von Stade—will offer a parade of arias, duets, and ensembles from the operatic repertory; Valery Gergiev and James Conlon, among others, conduct. (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

MODUS OPERA COMPANY
A new, professional-rank chamber outfit, under the direction of Justin Bischof, makes its début with a production of one of opera's foundation stones, Mozart's "Marriage of Figaro." Wendy Baker, Ariana Chris, and Andrew Nolen are featured in the cast. (Wallace Hall, Park Ave. at 84th St. 212-525-1300. May 18 at 7.)

AMERICAN OPERA PROJECTS: "FIRST GLIMPSE 2006"
An able cast of young singers (including the wonderful City Opera soprano Caroline Worra) perform music-theatre works-in-progress by James Borchers, David Claman, Conrad Cummings, Jeff Grace, Hannah Lash, and Gilda Lyons. (Great Room, South Oxford Space, 138 S. Oxford St., Brooklyn. 718-398-4024. May 19-20 at 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

"PERSPECTIVES: DAVID ROBERTSON"
In the finale of Robertson's personal season of Carnegie Hall concerts, the house has given the energetic American conductor carte blanche—and a "Zankel Band" made up of some of New York's best new-music players—with which to offer three important late-twentieth-century works by formidable European modernists, all inspired by folk song: Berio's "Naturale," Ligeti's scintillating Piano Concerto (with Eric Huebner), and Benjamin's "Antara." (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. May 18 at 7:30.)

NEW AMSTERDAM SINGERS
Clara Longstreth's excellent amateur group surveys fifty years of American choral music, by composers ranging from Ned Rorem ("From an Unknown Past") and John Corigliano ("L'Invitation au Voyage") to Matthew Harris and Eric Whitacre. (Immanuel Lutheran Church, Lexington Ave. at 88th St. 212-842-1511. May 18 at 8.)

VOICES OF ASCENSION
Dennis Keene's admired professional ensemble, with orchestra, pays tribute to the composers of the Renaissance, performing works by Josquin, Tallis, Lassus, and Palestrina. (Church of the Ascension, Fifth Ave. at 10th St. 212-358-1469. May 18 at 8.)

THE DESSOFF CHOIRS
The elegant tradition of British choral music is celebrated by James Bagwell's noted group, who perform a slate of works by Byrd, Britten, Tallis, Vaughan Williams, and the young composer Tarik O'Regan. (Immanuel Lutheran Church, Lexington Ave. at 88th St. 718-855-5020. May 19 at 8.)

NEW YORK YOUTH SYMPHONY
The New York area's leading young ensemble, turning in fine performances under its gifted conductor, Paul Haas, reaches for the top by offering a performance of Mahler's Sixth Symphony. The concert begins with a work by the promising composer Takuma Itoh (featuring the Shanghai String Quartet). (Carnegie Hall. 212-581-5933. May 21 at 2.)

AMERICAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA: "SWISS ACCOUNTS"
After centuries of slumber, Switzerland's compositional scene woke up in the early twentieth century, fielding three distinctive talents whose music combined intellectual fastidiousness with a moody, neo-Romantic spirit. Leon Botstein conducts Schoeck's "Nachhall" (his final song cycle, sung by the baritone John Hancock), Frank Martin's Cello Concerto (with Christian Poltéra), and two intense works by Arthur Honegger, "Pacific 231" and the Fifth Symphony ("Di Tre Re"). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5030. May 21 at 3.)

PITTSBURGH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Christoph von Dohnányi conducts the Pennsylvania band, which Mariss Jansons polished into a front-rank ensemble during the nineties. Haydn's Symphony No. 88, the epitome of Classical grace, leavens the more turbulent emotions of Bartók's "Divertimento" and Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6, "Pathétique." (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. May 23 at 8.)

RECITALS

NEW YORK FESTIVAL OF SONG: "HANDS ACROSS THE SEA"
The directors Steven Blier and Michael Barrett are on hand to accompany the soprano Lisa Vroman, the tenor Jason Graae, and others in a raft of songs by Broadway composers (Porter, Rodgers, Kern) who crafted their dashing tunes to fit the tastes of London's West End. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. May 16-17 at 8.)

DMITRI HVOROSTOVSKY
Shostakovich's "Suite on Words by Michelangelo," a late work of dark and concentrated power, leads off the great Russian baritone's Avery Fisher Hall recital, which also includes songs by Glinka, Borodin, Dargomyzhsky, Medtner, and Rachmaninoff. (212-721-6500. May 17 at 8.)

"RUTH LAREDO: A CELEBRATION"
Laredo, who died a year ago, was one of New York's most beloved pianists. A group of friends (including the soprano Courtenay Budd, the pianist Charles Wadsworth, and the Guarneri String Quartet) gather at her favorite venue—the Metropolitan Museum—to perform music by Schumann, Franck, Schubert, and Ravel (excerpts from "Mother Goose") in her honor. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. May 18 at 11 A.M. No tickets required.)

CONCERTANTE
The vibrant young string ensemble offers its final program of the season, works by Mozart (the Clarinet Quintet, with Alexander Fiterstein), Copland (the Sextet, featuring the pianist Xak Bjerken), and Mendelssohn (the String Quintet No. 2). (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. May 18 at 8.)

PRISM QUARTET
The noted saxophone quartet celebrates its twenti*eth-anniversary season with new and recent works* by Paola Prestini ("Where the Blue Waves Rock"), Matthew Levy, Efstratios Minakakis, and others. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. May 19 at 8:30.)

MAXIM VENGEROV
Vengerov, a violinist of extraordinary virtuosity and interpretive flair, performs (with the pianist Lilya Zilberstein) not only works by Prokofiev (the galvanic Sonata No. 1 in F Minor) and Shostakovich but also works by Mozart and Beethoven (the Sonata in C Minor, Op. 30, No. 2), composers lionized in Soviet Russia. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. May 20 at 8.)

BARGEMUSIC
Olga Bloom's deeply traditional floating chamber-music series takes a walk on the wild side, letting in the cutting-edge Flux Quartet to perform classic modern works by Feldman and Scelsi (the String Quartet No. 3) along with two new pieces (including one by Tom Chiu, the first violinist). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. May 21 at 4. For full schedule, see www.bargemusic.org.)

MOVIES OPENING

THE DA VINCI CODE
Ron Howard directed this thriller, based on the novel by Dan Brown, about the Louvre, the Holy Grail, and the fate of the world. Starring Tom Hanks and Audrey Tautou. Opening May 19. (In wide release.)

TABLES FOR TWO

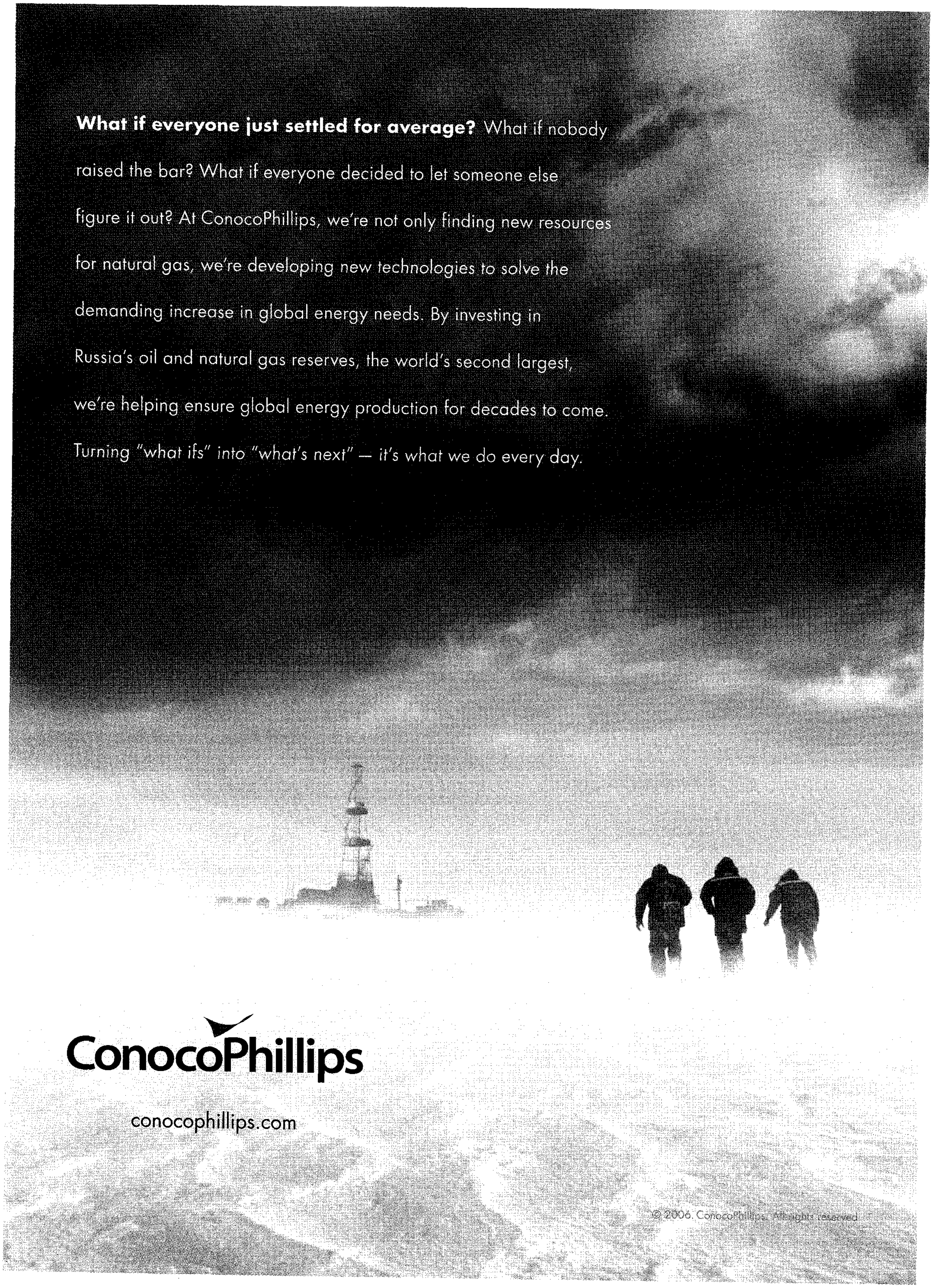
MOMOFUKU

163 First Ave., at 10th St. (212-475-7899)—Momofuku bills itself as a noodle bar, which seems a bit like calling Le Bernardin a crab shack. Its owner and chief ramenhead, David Chang, for one thing, was a nominee for the James Beard Foundation's Rising Star Chef of the Year award. The restaurant also has to be the best place in town to end up after a long day's schlep. Those post-and-lintel stools that fit like Yaffa Blocks against the big island tables! Ducasse may provide ottomans for purses, but Momofuku has cubbies, a good way to make you forget the futility, in the face of the grub that's coming, of having lugged around your gym bag.

Carbs and animal fat are Momofuku's invincible tag team. The steamed buns, for instance, turn out to be fluffy pockets of dough, sliced in half, smeared with hoisin sauce, and stuffed full of Berkshire pork that falls apart like barbecue. Momofuku Ramen begins as a bed of noodles; Chang and his fellow-chef, Joaquin Baca (a meat-loving Texan), add pig shoulder and belly and top it with their signature poached egg. The tiny green peas in the bowl—easy to drop with chopsticks—are so robust they bounce. Even Brussels sprouts, which come in a hot kimchi purée, are amped up with thick chunks of bacon.

In a place where the veggies are this loud, the music is bound to be important, and Chang and Baca play everything from Wu-Tang Clan to Ozzy Osbourne, with two firm exceptions: no Springsteen and no Kenny Loggins. No wine, either; just beer and sake. The line cooks, anyway, are the real entertainment. Slamming and sweating their way around an open galley kitchen, they manage to make noodles look dangerous. (The backward hats and skull-and-bones tattoos don't hurt.) The other night, one of them threw some squirming crawfish in a pan and lit it on fire, like a pyrotechnic effect at a heavy-metal show. The flames sizzled, and a waitress, squeezing past the stove, reapplied her lip gloss and coyly bumped him with her butt. (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Entrées $9-$23.)

—*Lauren Collins*



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THE KING
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening May 19. (Sunshine Cinema.)

LEMMING
A drama, directed by Dominik Moll, about a man whose wife seems possessed by his boss's late wife. In French. Opening May 19. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

MOUTH TO MOUTH
A début feature film, directed by Alison Murray, about a runaway girl who joins a radical group. Opening May 19. (Village East Cinemas.)

OVER THE HEDGE
An animated comedy, directed by Tim Johnson and Karey Kirkpatrick, about animals trying to cope with suburban sprawl. With the voices of Bruce Willis, Garry Shandling, Steve Carell, and Avril Lavigne. Opening May 19. (In wide release.)

REVOLOUTION
Bret Carr directed and stars in this drama, about a boxer, Lou Benedetti, who discovers that his stuttering and his violent impulses are connected. Opening May 19. (Village East Cinemas.)

SEE NO EVIL
A horror film, directed by Gregory Dark, about young people doing community service in a hotel that houses a madman. Opening May 19. (In wide release.)

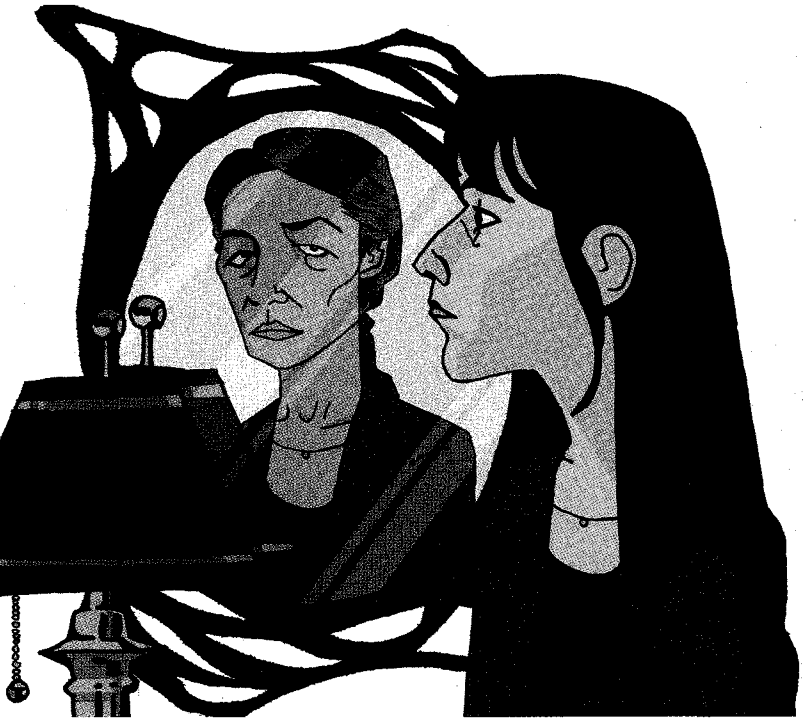
TWELVE AND HOLDING
Michael Cuesta directed this drama, about a group of Long Island kids who cope with the death of a friend. Opening May 19. (IFC Center.)

NOW PLAYING

ARMY OF SHADOWS
The tightest thriller in town. Jean-Pierre Melville is widely worshipped for his gangster sagas, such as "Le Samouraï" and "Le Cercle Rouge," but this tale of the French Resistance, though no less stylish (hats and dark suits still abound), has an added pulse of the heartfelt. It stars Lino Ventura as a stalwart of the underground movement, who slips the shackles of the occupying Germans and rejoins his small band of fellow-heroes. Not that their heroism is remotely flamboyant; what concerns Melville is the courage of the stoical, the phlegmatic, and the formidably organized. His direction honors that efficiency with a series of set pieces (one in a barber shop, another at Gestapo headquarters, a third in the face of a firing squad) in which the suspense grows almost intolerable. The movie, though made in 1969, has never been released here before. To miss it now would be a gross dereliction of duty. With an unflappable Simone Signoret. In French.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 5/8/06.) (Film Forum; May 17-23.)

ART SCHOOL CONFIDENTIAL
The director Terry Zwigoff's second collaboration with the graphic novelist Daniel Clowes (the first was the brilliant "Ghost World") follows a hapless art-school student, Jerome (Max Minghella), who refuses to give up his dream of being the greatest artist in the world. Zwigoff ensconces his youthful idealist in relentless satirical commentary on the stereotypes and (often hilarious) pomposities of art school. However, the simplistic dual plots—one involving Jerome's obsession with the prettiest girl on campus (Sophia Myles), the other having to do with a strangler on the loose—feel artificially applied, and make for a disjointed second half. Not even John Malkovich, as a drawing teacher who has discovered triangles after twenty-five years of struggle, can save this ultimately dull enterprise.—*Shauna Lyon* (Angelika Film Center and Empire 25.)

BUNNY LAKE IS MISSING
At first contact with an electric guitar, Otto Preminger, born in 1906, got a shock, which he conveys in this jangled psychological thriller from 1965, set in swinging London. A young American woman, Ann Lake (Carol Lynley), has just arrived with her journalist brother, Steven (Keir Dullea), and her four-year-old daughter, who seems to have vanished on her first day of school, although nobody—neither teachers nor students nor, for that matter, viewers—have seen her. The investigation by the dapper, ironic Superintendent Newhouse (Laurence Olivier) and his imputations regarding Ann's sanity take over the story, but the film's real charge lies elsewhere—in Preminger's view of a jolting, disoriented age of rock and roll. The mental chaos of the times is reflected in the behavior of the local solipsistic eccentrics (including a randy raconteur, played by Noël Coward), the nightmarish images, the backdrop of student protest and political crisis, and the frenzied soundtrack, which features the music of the Zombies.—*Richard Brody* (Museum of Modern Art; May 20.)



Two Charlottes, Rampling and Gainsbourg, star in "Lemming," opening May 19.

JASHAR AWAN

GIULIANI TIME
By September 10, 2001, Rudolph Giuliani seemed to have worn out his welcome as Mayor of New York, but the sorrier aspects of his two terms of office were all but wiped from collective memory by his aplomb amidst the chaos of 9/11. Kevin Keating's documentary is a bracing reminder of Giuliani's rule and a debunking of his reputation. Though sustained by the recurring onscreen presence of the journalist Wayne Barrett, its first hour of scattershot criticisms from such motivated rivals as David Dinkins and Ron Kuby plays like attack-ad overkill. But then the facts kick in. The increased police brutality, exacerbated racial tensions, disregard for civil liberties, callous indifference to suffering, the martyrdom of Amadou Diallo and Abner Louima—all are recalled in a seething assemblage of interviews and news clips that induce painful flashbacks. Unfortunately, Keating's technique is not up to his ambitions: as in campaign advertising, even the truth is often obscured by the hard-sell package.—*R.B.* (Sunshine Cinema.)

THE KILLER IS LOOSE
In this low-key pulp extravaganza from 1956, Joseph Cotten stars as Sam Wagner, a detective who challenges a bank robber at his hideout and, coming under fire, shoots back and accidentally kills the accused's wife. After his conviction, the criminal, Leon Poole (an eerily chilly Wendell Corey), leaves the courtroom vowing revenge against Wagner's wife, Lila (Rhonda Fleming). The result is a lesson in directing: Budd Boetticher turns this familiarly seamy setup into a grimly Hemingwayesque study of manhood and elusive honor. His static, airy compositions leave plenty of room for both sides to share the frame, and the resulting tensions—and ambiguities—are thrillingly hard to bear.—*R.B.* (Film Forum; May 17-18.)

THE KING
Elvis (Gael García Bernal), a clean-cut young man, emerges from the Navy and looks up his father, David (William Hurt), a prominent preacher in Corpus Christi, Texas. David, married with a family, has never acknowledged Elvis, whose mother was a prostitute. When he spurns the boy again, Elvis seduces David's teen-age daughter (Pell James) and menaces the rest of the family. The director, James Marsh, works in a quietly contemplative style that is meant to be lulling, but it backfires: Elvis's pathological acts arrive out of nowhere, and you can't believe any of them. Bernal, however, is creepily effective: his smile could seduce anyone. The movie seems to be an attack on the certainties of Evangelical Christianity; among other things, it offers a vicious practical refutation of the theory of intelligent design.—*David Denby* (Sunshine Cinema.)

LADY VENGEANCE
The third installment of the Korean director Park Chanwook's revenge trilogy may not be as graphically violent as its predecessors, but there are still buckets of blood and a curious lack of any emotional involvement besides disgust. The film's fragmented story line tells the tale of a woman who, to protect her daughter from a killer, deliberately spends years in prison for a murder she didn't commit. When she's released, she calls in favors from her former fellow-inmates to track down the real murderer. As a director, Park has a pulpy enough imagination, and his striking compositions and woozy camerawork are always visually commanding, but the film's enervated, single-minded quest for revenge leaves the viewer with nothing more to reflect on than cold moral ambiguity. In Korean.—*Bruce Diones* (Sunshine Cinema.)

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE III
Tom Cruise returns as Ethan Hunt, the superfit secret operative who needs a team of fellow-agents to help him retrieve his missing sense of humor. They must also track down Agent Lindsey Farris (Keri Russell) in Berlin. She has been captured by Owen Davian (Philip Seymour Hoffman), who represents an even greater threat to world stability than Truman Capote. This third installment of the franchise, directed by J. J. Abrams, is the most streamlined to date, with a succession of gargantuan set pieces (the best of them in the Vatican) and dogged attempts to perforate the eardrums of the audience. Little of it makes sense, and the treachery of insiders—a source of worry to Hunt's superiors, played by Laurence Fishburne and Billy

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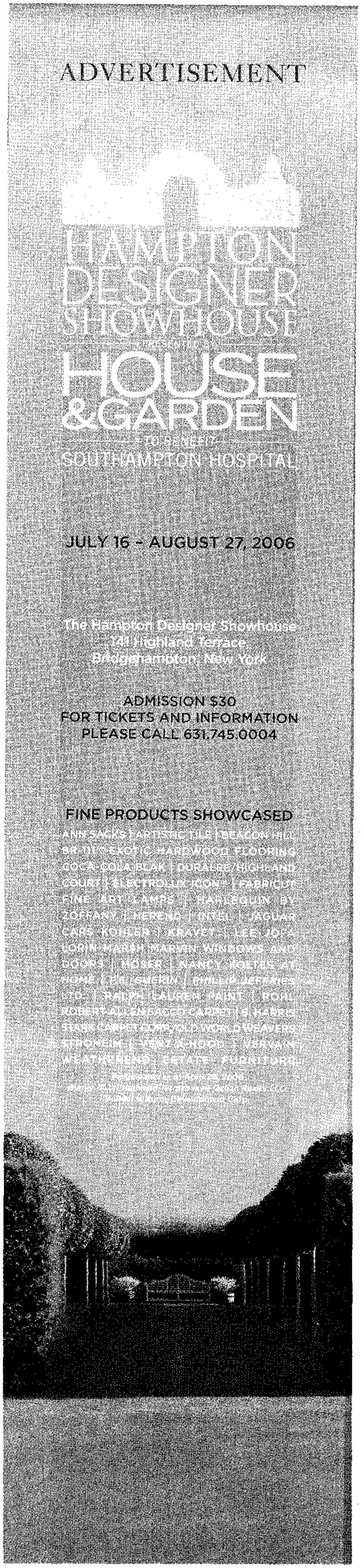
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Crudup—has become the most wearisome feature of the genre. Toward the end, Abrams seems to run out of juice, and the role of Hunt's new wife (Michelle Monaghan) feels insultingly plaintive and thin. A tip for the next sequel: the closer these movies get to the old TV series, with its indefatigable teamwork, the more gripping they become. The mission was never meant to be a one-man show. With the imperturbable Ving Rhames.—*A.L.* (5/15/06) (In wide release.)

POSEIDON
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

THE PROMISE
Lilac-pretty digital rubbish about warriors and princesses, all swirling around in what looks like a gigantic Chinese video game. Grandiose (allegedly the most expensive movie ever made in China) and flagrantly stylized in a way that is of no interest. Avoid. Directed by Chen Kaige. With Cecilia Cheung. In Mandarin.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

THE PROPOSITION
John Hillcoat's sweat-stained movie is set in the Australian outback at the tail end of the nineteenth century. Here, outside a remote settlement, live Captain Morris Stanley (Ray Winstone), the chief of police, and his wife, Martha (Emily Watson), who are striving to maintain a British decorum, complete with Christmas dinner, in an untamable land. Hence the determination with which Stanley pursues the Burns gang—three brothers (Richard Wilson, Guy Pearce, and Danny Huston) who have murdered a local family. The title refers to Stanley's risky offer: if the middle brother can find and kill the eldest and most savage, the youngest will be spared. What ensues is a strange blend of manhunt and tone poem, in which even the most brutal characters seem rapt in the face of red earth and endless sky. The film was written by Nick Cave, who, not surprisingly, supplied the music; the result may feel confused as a narrative, but, as a portrait of a riven culture, bred on racial conflict, it is formidably hard to ignore.—*A.L.* (5/8/06) (Angelika Film Center and Empire 25.)

RUSSIAN DOLLS
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (IFC Center.)

THREE WOMEN
In the Robert Altman canon, no picture is stranger—and more fascinating—than this 1977 phantasmagoria, set in the California desert near Palm Springs. Sissy Spacek plays Pinky Rose, a small-town Texas girl who gets a job as an attendant at a geriatric center and emulates her co-worker and roommate, Millie Lammoreaux (Shelley Duvall), to the point of stealing her identity. But Millie has created her identity from women's supermarket magazines—she's all about staying true to her favorite colors and filing recipes according to the cooking time. The third woman in the mix is a mysterious muralist named Willie (Janice Rule), who with her husband, Edgar (Robert Fortier), owns both the Purple Sage apartments, where the other two gals live, and the Dodge City bar where they hang out and hunt for men. When this couple is around, the movie veers into flimsy surreal melodrama, ending up as a cockeyed parable of female solidarity. Yet the film is full of images so rich that they transcend its metaphoric structure, like Millie watching Pinky's parents embracing in bed. And, throughout, Duvall is brilliant: she coins a brand-new caricature of the confident yet clueless single female, then suggests a real person underneath.—*Michael Sragow* (Moving Image; May 20-21.)

UNITED 93
Paul Greengrass's account of how a single group of passengers, almost certain of death, decided on the morning of September 11, 2001, to fight back against hijackers on a suicide mission turns out to be—after much public anxiety about potential "exploitation"—an example of a hundred per cent professional filmmaking. Greengrass's movie is tightly wrapped, unrelenting, and, no matter how exciting, superbly precise. For this story of semi-anonymous group heroism, he uses actual professionals (pilots, flight attendants, an air-traffic controller) mixed in with largely unknown actors, and avoids visual or verbal rhetoric. The handheld camera is an active participant in everything that's going on—and still manages to see what it needs to see out of the corner of its eye. The avoidance of front-and-center staging makes us feel the uncertainty of an unprecedented situation. This is true existential filmmaking; in the end, the viewer's dread is released in mad exhilaration as the passengers charge the hijackers with the force of engorged water breaking through a dam.—*D.D.* (5/1/06) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

AN AMERICAN HAUNTING: In wide release. **JUST MY LUCK:** In wide release. **REFUGE:** Quad Cinema. **STICK IT:** In wide release. **THE WILD:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"Surrealist Animation." May 17 at 7 and 9: Short films by Bill Plympton, Daina Krumins, Jan Svankmajer, and others, presented by Plympton and Krumins. ♦ "NewFilmmakers." May 17 at 8: "Witness," a short-film program by Third World Newsreel. ♦ "Unessential Cinema." May 18 at 8: Simultaneous projection of pairs of randomly selected films. ♦ "The *Onion* Presents." May 18 at 8: "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas" (1998, Terry Gilliam). ♦ Chinese avant-garde films. All films are in Mandarin. May 19 at 8: "Rapid Beijing" (2005, Shulin Zhao and Han Yuang). ♦ May 20 at 6: "Focus on Shanghai," a short-film program, part one. ♦ May 20 at 8: "Focus on Shanghai," a short-film program, part two. ♦ May 21 at 8: Works by Zhou Hongxiang (2004-05). ♦ Bosnian-Herzegovinian Film Festival. May 19-21: For program information, go to www.bhffnyc.org. ♦ "Essential Cinema." May 21 at 6: "Une Simple Histoire" (1958, Marcel Hanoun; in French, no subtitles).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"Sundance Institute at BAM." May 17 at 6:40 and May 20 at 1: "The Trials of Darryl Hunt" (2006, Ricki Stern and Annie Sundberg). ♦ May 17 at 9:40: "Destricted" (2006, short erotic films by Matthew Barney, Larry Clark, and others). ♦ May 18 at 4, May 19 at 9:45, and May 21 at 6:30: "Beyond Beats and Rhymes" (2006, Byron Hunt) and "Gesture Down" (2006, Cedar Sherbert). ♦ May 18 at 6:40 and May 20 at 4: "In Between Days" (2006, So Yong Kim). ♦ May 18 at 9:30 and May 21 at 3:30: "Wristcutters: A Love Story" (2006, Goran Dukic). ♦ May 19 at 4 and May 20 at 11:30: "The Foot Fist Way" (2006, Jody Hill). ♦ May 19 at 6:50 and May 21 at 9: "Sherrybaby" (2006, Laurie Collyer). ♦ May 20 at 6:30: "Forgiven" (2006, Paul Fitzgerald). ♦ May 20 at 9: "Stephanie Daley" (2006, Hilary Brougher). ♦ May 21 at noon: "Gas Food Lodging" (1992, Allison Anders). ♦ May 21 at 12:05: "Spanking the Monkey" (1994, David O. Russell). ♦ May 21 at 12:10: "The Unbelievable Truth" (1989, Hal Hartley). ♦ May 21 at 12:15: "Polyester" (1981, John Waters). The May 21 screenings will be followed by a panel discussion with Anders, Russell, Hartley, and Waters, moderated by Janet Maslin. ♦ Through May 30: "Dance Africa 2006." May 22 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Africa, I Will Fleece You" (1992, Jean-Marie Téno; in French). ♦ May 23 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Chief!" (1999, Téno; in French) and "Head in the Clouds" (1994, Téno; in French).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. May 17-23 at 1, 3:45, 6:45, and 9:30: "Army of Shadows" (†). ♦ Through June 15: "B Noir." May 17-18 at 1, 3:50, 7, and 10: "Crime Wave" (1954, André de Toth). ♦ May 17-18 at 2:25, 5:25, and 8:35: "The Killer Is Loose" (†). ♦ May 19-20 at 1:05, 4:40, and 8:15: "Gun Crazy" (1949, Joseph H. Lewis). ♦ May 19-20 at 2:50, 6:25, and 10: "The Big Combo" (1955, Lewis). ♦

May 21 at 1, 4, 7, and 10: "Detour" (1945, Edgar G. Ulmer). ♦ May 21 at 2:30, 5:30, and 8:30: "The Narrow Margin" (1952, Richard Fleischer). ♦ May 22 at 1, 4:10, 7:20, and 10:30: "Among the Living" (1941, Stuart Heisler). ♦ May 22 at 2:30, 5:40, and 8:50: "The Spiritualist (The Amazing Mr. X)" (1948, Bernard Vorhaus). ♦ May 23 at 1:05, 4:40, and 8:15: "I Was a Communist for the FBI" (1951, Gordon Douglas). ♦ May 23 at 2:50, 6:25, and 10: "The Mob" (1951, Robert Parrish). ♦ Première screening. May 17-23 at 1:15, 3:15, 6, 8, and 10: "No Laughing Matter," new animated films on adult themes.

FLORENCE GOULD HALL

55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through May 30: The films of André Téchiné. May 23 at 12:30, 4, and 7: "Loin (Far Away)" (2001; in French).

IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—The Films of Akira Kurosawa. May 19-21 at noon: "Rashomon" (1950; in Japanese). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." May 20-21: "The Thing with Two Heads" (1972, Lee Frost).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—Special screenings. May 17 at 6: Short films by Diane Bonder (1996-2006). ♦ May 18 at 8: "Lost in Wu Song" (2005, Lu Yitong; in Mandarin). ♦ May 20 at 6 and May 21 at 2: "Ringl and Pit" (1995, Juan Mandelbaum). The May 20 screening is introduced by the director. ♦ May 20 at 8 and May 22 at 6: "The Woman with the Hungry Eyes" (2006, Hugh Munro Neely). The May 20 screening is introduced by the producer, Andi Hicks, and the director. ♦ "In Memoriam: Nam June Paik." May 17 at 8: Program one, including "Button Happening" (1965). ♦ May 18 at 8: Program two, including "A Tribute to John Cage" (1973-76). ♦ May 21 at 4:30: Program three, including "Allan 'n' Allen's Complaint" (1982). ♦ May 22 at 8: Program four, including " 'Topless Cellist' Charlotte Moorman" (1995). ♦ "Prix Jean Vigo." May 18 at 6:45 and May 20 at 2: "Trop de Bonheur" (1994, Cédric Kahn; in French) and "Les Filles de Mon Pays" (1999, Yves Caumon; in French). ♦ Through June 21: "To Save and Project." May 19 at 6:30: "Crainquebille" (1923, Jacques Feyder; silent) and "Onésime and the Heart of the Gypsy" (1913, Jean Durand; silent). ♦ May 19 at 8:30: "The Amazing Mr. X (The Spiritualist)" (1948, Bernard Vorhaus). ♦ May 20 at 2: "3:10 to Yuma" (1957, Delmer Daves). ♦ May 20 at 4:15: "Bunny Lake Is Missing" (†). ♦ May 20 at 6:30: "People on Sunday" (1929, Robert Siodmak, Edgar G. Ulmer, and Fred Zinnemann; silent) and "Ideale Filmerzeugung" (1913, Ludwig Schaschek; silent). ♦ May 20 at 8:15: "Asphalt" (1929, Joe May; silent). ♦ May 21 at 1: "The Mark of Zorro" (1920, Fred Niblo) and "Aladdin and His Wonderful Lamp" (1939, Dave Fleischer). ♦ May 21 at 3: "The Way You Wanted Me" (1944, Teuvo Tulio; in Finnish). ♦ May 22 at 6: "In the Fields of Dreams" (1940, Tulio; in Finnish). ♦ May 22 at 8:15: "The Song of the Scarlet Flower" (1938, Tulio; in Finnish).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Special screenings. May 17 at 10:30 A.M.: "The Band Wagon" (1953, Vincente Minnelli). ♦ May 19 at 7:30: "Japón" (2002, Carlos Reygadas; in Spanish). ♦ Through June 8: "American Maverick: A Robert Altman Retrospective." May 20 at noon: "Tanner '88" (episodes nine and ten) (1988). ♦ May 20 at 1:30 and May 21 at 4: "Three Women" (†). ♦ May 20 at 4 and May 21 at 6:30: "Vincent and Theo" (1990). ♦ May 20 at 6:30: "The Player" (1992). ♦ May 21 at noon: "Tanner '88" (episodes eleven and twelve). ♦ "Fist and Sword: Martial Arts Classics." May 21 at 1:30: "Time and Tide" (2000, Tsui Hark; in English, Mandarin, and Spanish).

PIONEER THEATRE

155 E. 3rd St. (212-591-0434)—Special screenings. May 17 at 7 and May 19 at 9: "Send in the Clown" (2006, Spencer Schilly). ♦ May 18-19 at 7, May 20-21 at 5:15 and 9, May 22 at 5:15 and 9:30, and May 23 at 5:15 and 9: "Forgiving Dr. Mengele" (2006, Bob Hercules and Cheri Pugh). ♦ May 18 at 9: "City of Photos" (2005, Nishtha Jain; in Gujarati and Hindi). ♦ May 21 at 7: Short films from Latvia. ♦ May 22 at 7: "What Is a Man Without a Moustache?" (2005, Hrvoje Hribar; in Croatian).

SUNSHINE CINEMA

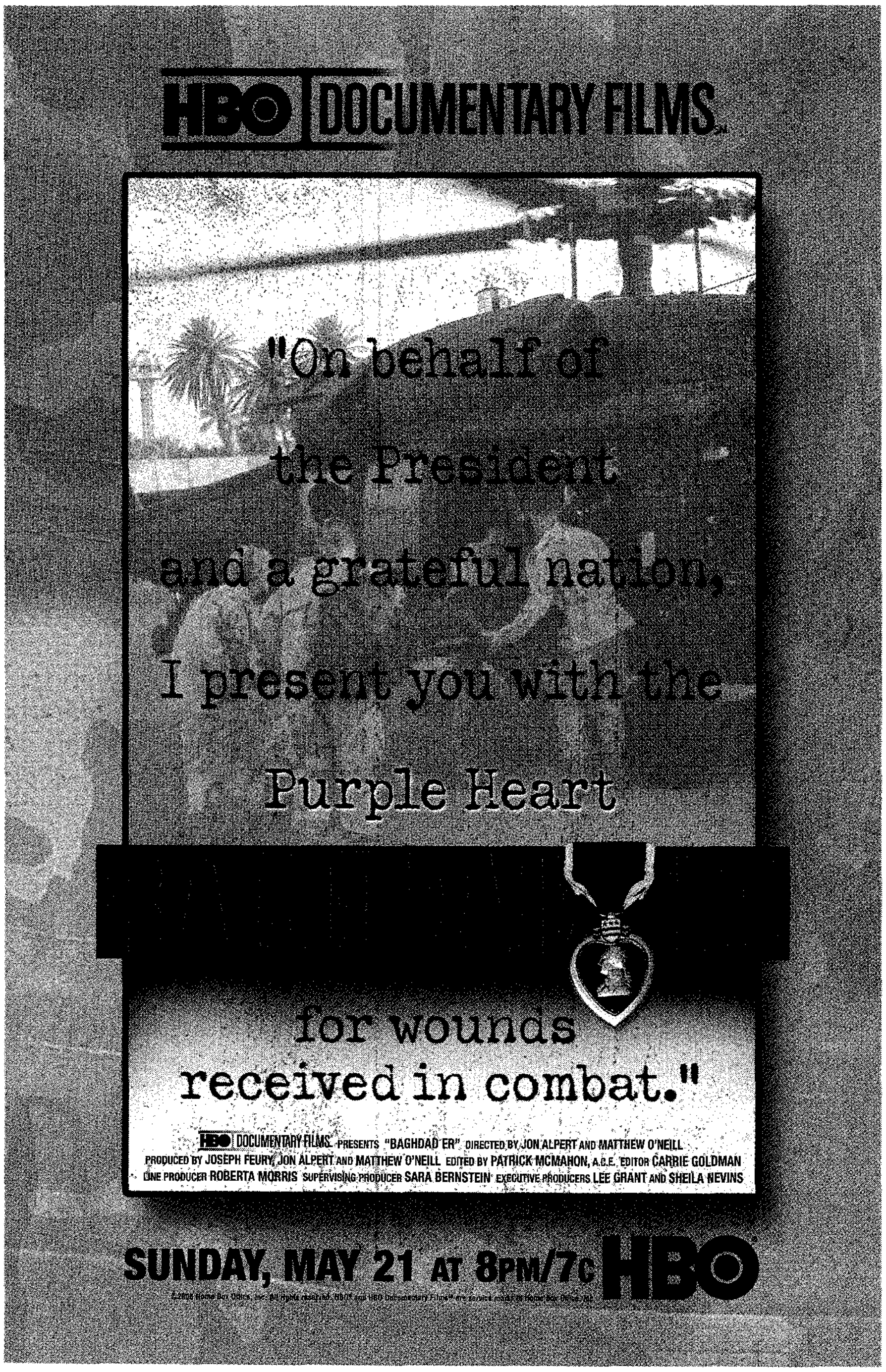
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." May 19-20: "The Great Muppet Caper" (1981, Jim Henson).

THALIA THEATRE

Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—Special screenings. May 17 at 8: Short films by Cameron Jamie, with live music by Keiji Haino and the Melvins. ♦ May 21 at 2 and May 23 at 3:30: "Sophie Scholl: The Final Days" (2005, Marc Rothemund; in German). ♦ May 21 at 4:30 and May 23 at 6 : "The Umbrellas of Cherbourg" (1964, Jacques Demy; in French).

WALTER READE THEATRE

Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Films from Syria. All films are in Arabic. May 17 at 2 and 6:15: "Passion" (2004, Mohammad Malas). ♦ May 17 at 4:10: "Shadows and Light, the Last of the Pioneers: Nazih Shahbandar" (1994, Malas, Oussama Mohammad, and Omar Amiralay) and short films. ♦ May 17 at 8:30: "The Dream" (1981, Malas) and "Journey Into Memory" (2006, Hala Mohammad). ♦ May 18 at 2 and 6:15: "A Plate of Sardines" (1997, Amiralay) and short films. ♦ May 18 at 4:15: A program of short films (1977-2005). ♦ May 18 at 8:30: "The Night" (1993, Malas). ♦ Through May 30: "Farewell: A Tribute to Elem Klimov and Larisa Shepitko." All films are in Russian. May 19 at 1 and 4:45, May 21 at 4:45, and May 22 at 2:30: "Heat" (1963, Shepitko) and "Larisa" (1980, Klimov). ♦ May 19 at 3:10 and 7, May 21 at 9:15, and May 22 at 1: "Welcome, or No Trespassing" (1964, Klimov). ♦ May 19 at 8:45 and May 21 at 7: "The Ascent" (1978, Shepitko). ♦ May 20 at 1:15 and 9:15: "Come and See" (1978, Klimov). ♦ May 20 at 4 and May 23 at 2:15 and 6:15: "Wings" (1966, Shepitko) and "The Homeland of Electricity" (1967, Shepitko). ♦ May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SUNDAY, MAY 21 AT 8PM/7C HBO

20 at 6:20, May 21 at 1:45, and May 23 at 8:40: "Agony (Rasputin)" (1981, Klimov). ♦ May 23 at 4:30: "The Adventures of a Dentist" (1965, Klimov).

READINGS AND TALKS

MARY ELLEN MARK
The photographer discusses her books "Falkland Road" and "Exposure." (Strand Bookstore, Broadway at 12th St. No tickets necessary. May 17 at 7.)

POETRY SOCIETY OF AMERICA
The society presents a reading and discussion of work by twentieth-century female poets writing in German. The poets and critics Peter Filkins, Edward Hirsch, Glyn Maxwell, and Marjorie Perloff will consider the writings of Rose Ausländer, Ingeborg Bachmann, Nelly Sachs, and others. In English. (Goethe-Institut New York, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. For more information, call 212-254-9628. May 17 at 7:30.)

MCNALLY ROBINSON BOOKSELLERS
A reading from the new anthology "The Thinking Fan's Guide to the World Cup," with Geoff Dyer, Ben Pauker, Said Sayrafiezadeh, and other contributors. (50 Prince St. No tickets necessary. May 18 at 7.)

GEORGE MATTESON
The maritime historian discusses his book "Tugboats of New York: An Illustrated History." (Robert F. Wagner, Jr., Park, Battery Park City. For more information, call 212-267-9700. May 20 at 2.)

"RELIVING THE ROUNDTABLE"
The Algonquin Hotel recently initiated a monthly series paying tribute to Dorothy Parker and her circle. On May 22, Nat Benchley reads from the humorous works of his grandfather Robert. The show gets under way at 7, but, in keeping with the spirit of things, the cocktail hour starts at 6. (Algonquin Hotel, 59 W. 44th St., 2nd fl. For reservations, call 212-840-6800.)

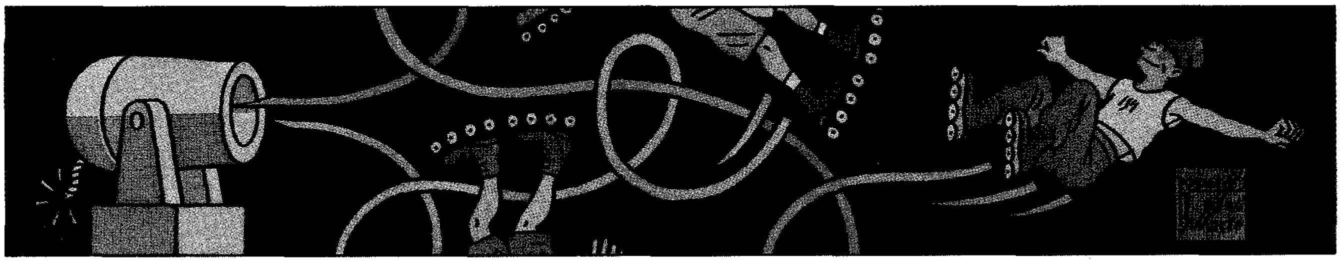
"THE HIJACKING OF JESUS"
Dan Wakefield, the author of "The Hijacking of Jesus: How the Religious Right Distorts Christianity and Promotes Prejudice and Hate," joins Susan Jacoby, the author of "Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism," and the Reverend Donna Schaper to discuss religion and politics. (Riverside Church, 490 Riverside Dr., between 120th and 122nd Sts. No tickets necessary. May 22 at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"BIKE MONTH NYC"
According to the nonprofit group Transportation Alternatives, one of the organizers of this event, more than a hundred thousand New Yorkers ride a bicycle on an average day, up fifty per cent since 1996. With gas prices hitting eye-popping highs, those numbers might rise even more, so the activities scheduled for this month couldn't be more timely. They include tours of the city's many bike paths, a bicycle film festival, repair workshops, and more. (For a complete schedule, visit www.bikemonthnyc.org.)

WORKING HARBOR DAY
These days, the waterfront is often thought of as a location for new luxury housing, but New York Harbor is still one of the nation's largest ports. The tugboats, barges, and container terminals may blend in with the scenery, but on May 20 three separate narrated tours, running up the Hudson River, along the Brooklyn waterfront, and between Staten Island and New Jersey, will bring them into full view. Departures start at 10:30 A.M., from Pier 63 Maritime, where there'll also be food, entertainment, and the chance to roam aboard historic vessels, including the Frying Pan, a retired lightship. (Hudson River at W. 23rd St. For more information, visit www.workingharbor.org.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
After two weeks of mega-sales, the city's auction houses return to a more measured pace, offering tasteful, elegant art work, lots of furniture, and, at **Sotheby's**, an impressive selection of wines from a private collection (May 20)—just the thing to soothe the nerves. Also notable is a sale of Old Master paintings (May 18), brimming over with sumptuous bouquets, moody landscapes, and fifteenth- and sixteenth-century religious subjects. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ At **Christie's**, May 17 brings a sale of furniture and decorations from the Park Avenue apartment of the late philanthropist Evelyn Annenberg Hall; on the same day, the house offers a selection of furniture, Old Master paintings, silver, porcelain, and clocks from the venerable Bond Street gallery Partridge, including a Louis XV musical mantel clock resting on the portly figure of a rhinoceros. Sales of European furniture (May 18) and historical documents from the Forbes collection (May 19) follow. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ May 23 is a big day for **Doyle**, a house that usually lives in the shadows of the two majors. It offers sales of American art (including a large selection of landscapes), modern and contemporary art (led by a work by the German artist Oskar Schlemmer), and European art (in which "Un Beau Matin d'Été," painted by Matisse in 1905 in the fishing village of Collioure, steals the show with its vibrant colors and vivid brushstrokes). (175 E. 87th St. 212-427-2730.)



JOOST SWARTE

The Dutch troupe 4-Ish, which combines hip-hop music and extreme sports.

ON THE HORIZON

DANCE
PUMP UP THE JAMS
June 2

The exuberant young Dutch troupe 4-Ish—made up of skateboarders, break-dancers, acrobats, skaters, martial artists, a d.j., and a beat-boxer—combines extreme sports and hip-hop grooves at the New Victory. (212-239-6200.)

MOVIES
RIGHTS, CAMERA . . .
June 8-22

The Human Rights Watch Film Festival, an annual fixture at the Walter Reade Theatre, offers works that decry injustices overlooked in the season's gaudier entertainments. This year's offerings include "KZ," a documentary about daily life in the Austrian town of Mauthausen; "Black Gold," a report from Ethiopia on a coffee coöperative's struggle to survive; and "Amu," an Indian drama about the massacre of thousands of Sikhs in 1984. (212-875-5600.)

ART
NO MERE MORTALS
June 13-Sept. 10

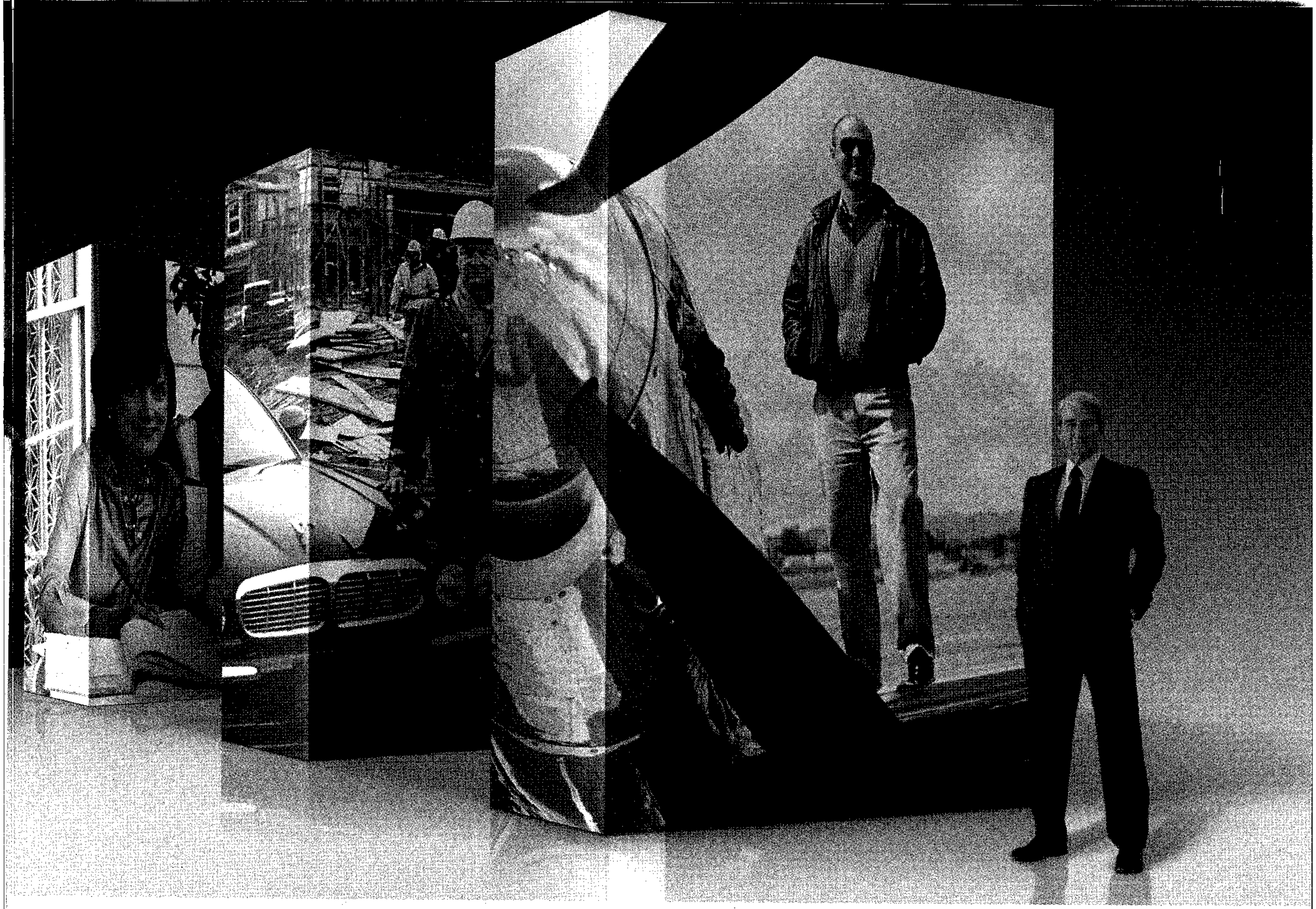
The Met's "Treasures of Sacred Maya Kings" might be more properly called "Treasures That Made the Maya Kings Sacred." The carvings and sculptures in this exhibition, executed in jade, granite, clay, and bone, were objects of worship intended to inspire awe and obeisance and to elevate their subjects to divine status. (212-535-7710.)

NIGHT LIFE
OUT IN THE STREETS
June 20

The big-band sound of the Jonathan Stout orchestra, featuring Hilary Alexander, opens the Midsummer Night Swing series, at Lincoln Center. A custom-built dance floor on the plaza next to the famous fountain will be home to a month's worth of ballroom, salsa, disco, and other forms of dancing. (212-721-6500.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
ITALIAN STYLE
July 8 and July 22

Will Crutchfield may not be Riccardo Muti, but his offerings of bel-canto opera at Caramoor have become a mainstay of the summer season. This year features "I Puritani" (with Sumi Jo) and "Tancredi" (with Ewa Podleś). (Katonah, N.Y. 914-232-1252.)



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Where we go when we go back to the drawing board.

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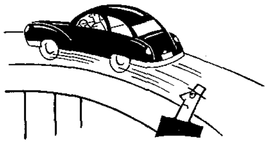
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

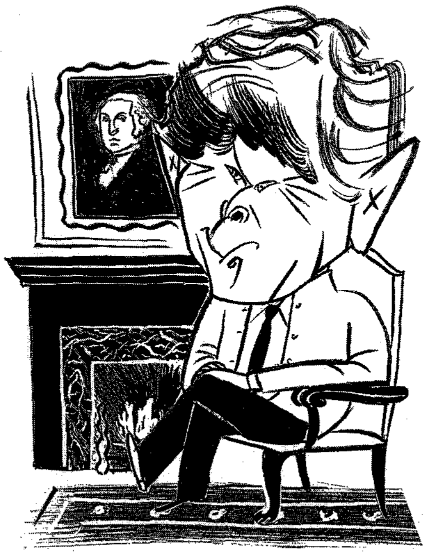
COMMENT
FUEL DUEL



Last week was another unhappy one for President Bush. His popularity ratings dropped again; news of chaos and civil war flowed unabated out of Iraq; the appointment of the former head of the N.S.A. as the director of the C.I.A. was jeopardized by further reports of domestic wiretapping; and gasoline prices continued to cause distress from coast to coast. And it got worse: the President found his Administration being compared—by his own ostensible supporters—to that of a certain Georgia peanut farmer whose Presidency became a byword for haplessness. "It is no accident," the *National Review* wrote of a panicky Republican scheme to hand out hundred-dollar rebates to angry drivers, "that the proposal closely mirrors a Jimmy Carter-proposed rebate to try to boost the economy, a pathetic initiative from a pathetic administration." The tone of the article echoed that of the Fox News commentator Tony Snow, who, before being recruited as the new White House press secretary, complained that Bush's energy plans were "filled with stuff that even Jimmy Carter abandoned."

The current energy crisis is not yet as spectacular as the one that bedevilled Carter. The economy is not in recession, and there are no gun-wielding protesters enraged by long gas lines. What's more, because the Bush family has for years had close ties to the House of Saud—despite its financial support of Wahhabi clerics who preach jihad—relations with at least one major oil producer are more civil than they were then. A few weeks ago, His Excellency Ali al-Naimi, the Saudi petroleum minister, participated in an energy forum in Washington, and sounded much like any platitudinous American statesman. "We are at the crossroads on the path to our energy future," he said, and must "avoid repeating the costly mistakes of the past." He even made a joke about conserving energy by turning down the air-conditioning in the building: "It's freezing."

One thing that the two energy crises have in common is that both were preceded by upheavals in the Middle East—in Carter's case the Iranian revolution, in Bush's the war in Iraq. But in many ways the challenges that the United States faces now are more daunting than those of the nineteen-seventies. Iran's current anti-American leader, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has waved aside American (and European) efforts to halt his nuclear program, noting, "Ultimately, they need us more than we need them." We now compete for oil with voracious energy consumers like China and India. And, as hurricane season approaches (and as the connection between more violent storms and global warming seems to grow increasingly evident), refineries continue to struggle with the disruptions from Katrina.



Even sentimental Democrats today tend to think of the Jimmy Carter of the seventies as a hand-wringing Milquetoast, more rabbit than killer. He and Congress, though, took on the energy emergency with a vigor that seems unimaginable these days. They deregulated oil and gas prices, created the Department of Energy, and got utilities to increase their use of natural gas and coal. They also allocated hefty sums for solar and other alternative-energy sources and pursued President Ford's policy of higher fuel-economy standards for new cars. By the time Carter left office, the consumption of foreign oil had fallen by nearly two million barrels a day, to seven million barrels. Predictably, as oil prices dropped, so did the urge to conserve. Ronald Reagan revoked environmental policies and ripped Carter's solar panels off the White House

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

roof, and Americans learned to love big cars again. We now import about thirteen million barrels of foreign oil a day, an increase of eighty-five per cent.

In the State of the Union address, and again in a speech in April, Bush deplored America's "addiction to oil," rightly describing it as "a matter of national security." He also asked Americans to buy more hybrid and clean-diesel cars, and endorsed the development of solar and wind power—something that must have given Carter a grim sense of vindication. But that was just talk. Bush's energy bill, four years in the making and signed just nine months ago, didn't even mandate increases in fuel-economy standards, which are worse today than they were in 1986: 24.6 miles to the gallon, on average, as opposed to 26.5. (He has since raised the standard for light trucks, by a few miles per gallon, effective 2011.) Ethanol was the bill's favored alternative fuel, since the corn it is mostly made from is grown in the Midwest, where several competitive congressional races are being fought this year. For the most part, though, the bill proposed a predictable array of tax breaks for energy producers, some $14.5 billion, the vast majority of which went to the coal, natural-gas, nuclear-power, and oil industries.

This approach has not been well received by voters, who recently also learned that in 2005 ExxonMobil enjoyed the highest corporate profit in history—$36.13 billion—and that its president earned two hundred and fifty thousand dollars a week. With only thirteen per cent of the public approving of Bush's handling of gasoline prices, congressional Republicans are having second thoughts about those oil-company tax breaks, while Democrats focus primarily on a feeble but presumably popular measure that would reduce the federal gas tax for sixty days and increase taxes on oil companies.

What no elected official has yet taken a stand on is the fact that there is an obvious way to begin addressing the energy crisis, one that would reduce our need for foreign oil, encourage fuel efficiency, attack global warming, and maybe banish the Hummer forever: a steep tax on gasoline. The general assumption is that this would be political poison—too many Americans have to drive long distances to work. As a result, the gas tax, which is 18.4 cents a gallon, hasn't been raised since 1993. But if most or all of the proceeds were returned to consumers, in the form of lower payroll taxes, the impact on the economically vulnerable would be minimized. Many economists have advocated such a plan, and even some of the most stalwart anti-tax Republicans, such as Grover Norquist, have expressed support for it. Robert H. Frank, a professor of economics at Cornell, has pointed out that when Carter made a similar proposal it was defeated by opponents who argued that drivers would buy just as much gas as they did before, with the money they got back in reduced taxes. But if people are given the right incentives they are likely to save both ways, by taking their rebates and by buying more fuel-efficient cars, thereby reducing consumption and spending.

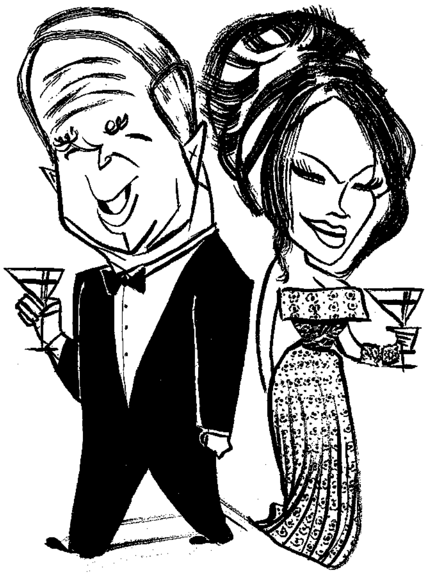
After September 11th, Bush had an opportunity to propose such a plan, telling Americans that they could join the war on terror by paying more for gasoline and using less of it. Franklin D. Roosevelt proved after Pearl Harbor that fear can be a powerful spur to civic virtue. Bush, in his address to Congress on September 20, 2001, did not invoke anything like the Rooseveltian "privilege of self-denial." Instead, he promised to protect us from terrorism, "eliminate it, and destroy it where it grows." As for the rest of the nation, Bush said, "Americans are asking: What is expected of us? I ask you to live your lives, and hug your children." Unfortunately, Americans are as fearful as ever, and they are demanding a plausible energy policy. Maybe it's not too late for the "war President" to try something truly brave: tell us the truth about the real costs of oil and the ravaging effects of greenhouse gases, and do what should have been done a generation ago.

—*Dorothy Wickenden*

DEPT. OF HOOPLA

STARS ON STARS

Jimmy Wales, the creator of Wikipedia, was honored by *Time* last week at a gala dinner for him and ninety-nine other of the world's "most influential" people. The *Time* 100, as they were called, had been divided into categories that brought to mind a game of Trivial—or, in some cases, Serious—Pursuit: "Artists & Entertainers," "Builders & Titans," "Leaders & Revolutionaries." Wales, according to *Time*, "is celebrated as a champion of Internet-enabled egalitarianism. He describes himself not as anti-elitist but as 'anticredentialist.' "A fine credo, actually, for the evening: a sort of velvet-roped, live-action Wikipedia royale in which list members assessed fellow-partygoers, absent any particular qualification besides their mutual influentialness.



John McCain and J.Lo

"I'm desperate to meet Rachael Ray," Wales said. "During cocktails, J. Lo bumped up against me, and I was, like, 'Eh.' " He shrugged.

Lopez's husband, Marc Anthony, seemed, on the other hand, firmly in her sway. "I still haven't been able to get her to drink a beer," he said, pushing a glass of lager in her direction. "I don't like beer," Lopez said.

Steve Wynn's wife, Elaine, was excited to meet Condoleezza Rice. Ralph Nader, sitting next to Wynn, just had. "I talked to Condi Rice about the plight of the Palestinians and the collapse of their health-care system," he said. "She said that they'll get emergency medicines to them as soon as possible." Nader and Steve Wynn were, as Elaine put it, "just getting reacquainted, which is a lovely thing."

"Steve, before I forget, will you give me your card?" Nader said.

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"I don't have one, but I'm an easy guy to find," Wynn answered.

Rounding out their table were the quasi-palindromic lovers David Lauren and Lauren Bush (Nader asked for her contact information, too), and Martha Stewart, who, Steve Wynn noted, had made a beautiful bouquet for his daughter's wedding.

Lauren's parents, Ralph and Ricky, were sitting a few feet away. In the elevator up to the party, a *Time* escort had briefed them on their tablemates, "Will Smith and Senator McCain."

"What's his first name?" Ricky asked. She pulled out a hairbrush and started fluffing furiously.

An encounter between Arianna Huffington and Daddy Yankee illustrated the principle that celebrities facing a dearth of conversational options invoke the names of other celebrities with approximately the same frequency with which regular people use the word "um."

"Anderson Cooper loved you," Huffington was saying to Daddy Yankee, as John Leguizamo approached.

"Are you from New York?" Leguizamo asked.

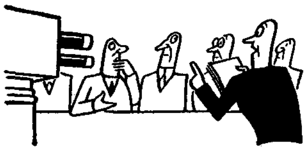
"No, I grew up in Puerto Rico," Daddy Yankee said. "On my next album, with Interscope, I'm working with Dr. Dre, and Will from the Black Eyed Peas."

"Damn, Daddy! You gonna blow up."

Across the room was Mukhtaran Bibi, a woman from Pakistan whom *Time* had deemed a "Hero & Pioneer": she went to court to protest after being gang-raped as punishment for her brother's crime of walking with a girl from a different tribe. Bibi was less than starstruck by the scene. "I know no one and know of no one," she said, through a translator, and raised a hand to her mouth to cover a yawn.

—*Lauren Collins*

THE PICTURES
ALTMAN ALOFT



In his eighty-second year, Robert Altman is managing to do what he's always done: making films that he wants to make, ignoring anyone else's market-tested notion of what will or won't fly at the box office, and remaining utterly cool. His manner puts one in mind of a laconic jazz musician—equal faith in art and in technique, and never an iota of attitude. He also appears, as always, to be having a pretty good time.

One breezy recent evening, in downtown St. Paul, a parade of ten horse-drawn carriages, led by a high-school marching band, departed from the circular drive in front of the swanky enough St. Paul Hotel. Altman and his wife, Kathryn Reed Altman, rode in the lead carriage, along with St. Paul's most celebrated citizen, Garrison Keillor, and his eight-year-old daughter, Maia. Six blocks away, the procession halted at the Fitzgerald Theatre, since 1978 the home venue of Keillor's radio variety program, "A Prairie Home Companion." For five weeks last summer, the Fitz was also the set of Altman's latest film, a.k.a. "A Prairie Home Companion." The parade kicked off the Midwest première of the movie, which officially opens next month. The film's conceit is that it documents the final broadcast of "A Prairie Home Companion." Which meant that the occasion at the Fitz had a distinctly hall-of-mirrors quality: an audience that included several "Prairie Home Companion" regulars (Tim Russell, Sue Scott, Tom Keith) watched a fictionalized rendering of that mythical-real radio program, along with several actors who, onscreen, were impersonating radio performers (Kevin Kline, Meryl Streep, Lily Tomlin, Lindsay Lohan). Though this is Altman and Keillor's first collaboration, it reflects what their work has in common: unsentimental romance, adroitly precise satire, and an uncorny love of American music.

Accepting an Academy Award this year—his first, for lifetime achievement—Altman alluded to transplant surgery he had in 1995, when he received a heart from a donor in her thirties, a circumstance that he calculates will keep him working for several more decades. He walks slowly (he claims to have the world's worst feet) but otherwise hasn't altered his pace.

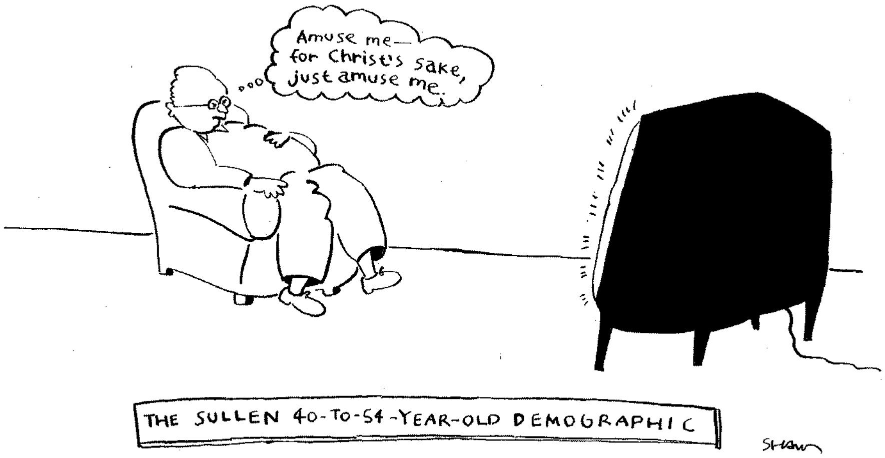
"I'm still impressed by these things," he said the other day, in a lounge at Teterboro Airport, in New Jersey, before boarding a private jet that a "Prairie Home Companion" investor had dispatched to fly him to Minnesota. "Someone tells me they want me to go to Chicken Switch, Arizona—if they'll send me a plane, I'll go."

Aloft, Altman sat across the aisle from Kevin Kline, who mentioned that he'd been reading "Everyman," Philip Roth's new novel. "It's mainly about growing old," he said.

Altman, who was wearing olive cords, a brown suède jacket, and a black leather cap that he never removed, nodded and said, "I was telling someone that 'A Prairie Home Companion' is all about death. Everybody dies." (Not quite.)

"Some of my jokes die," Kline said.

Bob Berney, the president of Picturehouse, the movie's distributor, and his wife, Jeanne, were also on board. Somewhere over Michigan, Jeanne informed Altman, "So, Bob, the pilot says he went to a preview screening of 'M*A*S*H' at the University of Minnesota in 1970 and you showed up. Do you remember doing that?"


Amuse me—for Christ's sake, just amuse me.
THE SULLEN 40-TO-54-YEAR-OLD DEMOGRAPHIC
SHAW

"I could have," Altman replied.

"He says you were there."

"Well, good for me."

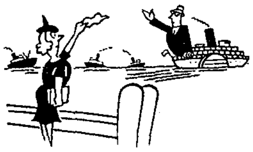
He continued, "When 'M*A*S*H' opened"—according to the *Times* review, "the first American movie openly to ridicule belief in God"—"my father called his sister, my aunt Pauline, and said, 'Don't go to that movie. That's a dirty movie Bob's made.' "

Altman grew up in Kansas City. Asked when he last visited there, he consulted his wife: "Kathryn, when did my father die?" The answer was 1979, but he was forgetting the six weeks on location in 1995 shooting "Kansas City," a Depression-era story with approximately the same quotient of music as "A Prairie Home Companion."

"I didn't really know anyone in Kansas City by then," he said. "But I still hear from people there from time to time. I get letters. 'Here's a thing that happened,' they'll say. 'I've got a story for you. Why don't you make a movie out of this?' " He paused and shook his head. "People think you just go make a movie."

—*Mark Singer*

HAMPTONS POSTCARD
EZ-HOAX



Shelter Island's first inhabitants, the Manhanset Indians, called their home *Manhansack-aha-quash-awomack*, which means "an island sheltered by islands"—or, in other words, "take a boat or swim." At least since the days of Nathaniel Sylvester and his teen-age wife, Grissel, who survived a shipwreck on their way from Barbados in 1652, travellers to the area have been content to rely on the former method of conveyance, which, while not free or available at whim, claims the advantages of dispatch and dryness. Comers and goers have their choice of two ferries, one to Greenport and the other to North Haven. Each shoves off every fifteen or so minutes and costs around ten dollars.

Native Shelter Islanders are bred to regard the exigencies of the ferry schedule with less annoyance than with pride; in homage to their ability to run like rabbits for the docks, they're known as "hareleggers." "The same thing that happened to Staten Island would happen to us," Arthur Bloom, a sixth-generation resident, said the other day, at the thought of constructing automobile-friendly points of egress. On the other hand, the "touristas," as Bloom calls them, "move here because of its charm and seclusion, then cry out for a bridge so that they will not be so isolated." Bloom is the Recording Secretary, Director of Safety & Security, Rodent Mitigation Officer, and chef de cuisine of the Shelter Island Bridge and Tunnel Authority, which, of course, does not exist except in his very enterprising imagination.

One afternoon a couple of years ago, Bloom, who is semi-retired from his job as a telephone repairman, was hanging around with some friends, "just thinking about how to try to mess with the tourists' heads." They decided that a good way to "have a laugh around town amongst the local goobers" would be to pretend that there were easier ways to get on and off the island—i.e., the "Stirling Memorial Tunnel" and the "Sunrise Bridge." The result was a fictitious transit agency that, with the hermetic exactingness of a Christmas village or a Monopoly board, included details like "EZ-Path" express lanes and its own motto, "*Nulla tenaci invia est via*" ("For the tenacious, no road is impassable"). Bloom got some SIBTA bumper stickers printed up and built a Web site.

In March, he received an e-mail from Jim Crawford, the director of the E-Z Pass Interagency Group. Crawford, who had been tipped off by a member of a toll-agency trade organization, cc'd a Port Authority lawyer and another official with the ominous-sounding domain address "@turnpike.state.nj.us." "Do you have an electronic toll collection system?" Crawford wrote. "Are the signs shown on your home page . . . showing one of your facilities?" He was referring to a photograph of the Lincoln Tunnel. Bloom had pulled it off the Internet to illustrate his Stirling Memorial Tunnel, which, according to a caption, is built "in the style of the Hypernatremian Tunnel, which connects the villages of Ersatz and Bogusse."

No, you idiot, Bloom thought, as he read the e-mail. It's *your* tunnel!

"I printed the e-mail out," Bloom said, "and took it down to the bar and showed everybody, and they were just rolling on the floor. I said, 'What am I going to do?' and the guys said, 'You've got him hooked. Well, now you've got to reel him in.' "

Bloom enlisted a retired lawyer friend, and the two wrote, on dummied-up SIBTA stationery, to say that they would accept correspondence only via U.S. Mail. Two weeks later, they received a letter from the Port Authority attorney, George Snyder, who objected, among other things, to their play on the E-ZPass service mark, which, "as you are undoubtedly aware," he wrote, "[is] exceedingly well-known—indeed, famous." He continued:

> Both EZ-Path and the E-ZPass marks begin with the "E-Z" prefix followed by a word of which the first two letters are "PA." Furthermore, the "TH" sound at the end of your organization's mark is not unlike the "SS" sound at the end of our client's.

Snyder also suggested that SIBTA was in violation of rules governing the use of certain typefaces and the color purple.

"All they have to do is look at the words on the Web site," Bloom said. "It's all nonsense! It's all bullshit!"

For instance, Southfork Construction, Utilities, Maintenance, Bridging, and Grading—the company that supposedly built the Sunrise Bridge—abbreviates to form the acronym SCUMBAG. That bridge, accordingly, lies within Peconic County, Bloom's own Yoknapatawpha. And positions in SIBTA's civil-service arm are filled by an exam that's administered every hundred years, or, in non-centenary times, by hereditary succession.

Crawford, after being alerted, over the phone the other day, to the fact that SIBTA was a hoax, was not mollified. "We don't take lightly people going around and putting the E-ZPass name wherever they want to put it," he said. "People who are not in on the joke may be misled to the point of assuming that certain services are available when they're not." He went on, "It's an insult to the Port Authority, quite frankly."

In the wake of Crawford's e-mail, SIBTA has retired "EZ-Path," in favor of the slogan, in yellow font, "EZcome-EZgo." This resolution was passed at an April 15th meeting of the SIBTA board of directors. It was held in Suite 100, Mezzanine Level, of the New Prospect Hotel, which burned down in 1942.

—*Lauren Collins*

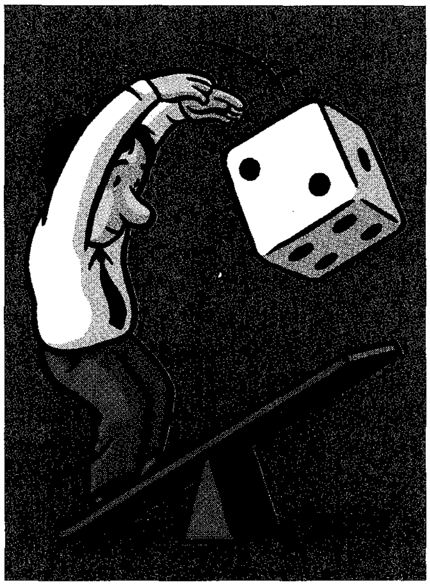
THE FINANCIAL PAGE
HEDGEMONY

In the past five years, hedge funds have become a new power on Wall Street; the number of funds has doubled, to more than eight thousand, and the assets they control have tripled, to more than a trillion dollars. In the process, they've also become a favorite scapegoat for bad financial news, blamed for everything from inflating the housing bubble and demolishing stock prices to jacking up the price of oil. A German politician has called hedge funds "locusts" of the global economy, while William Donaldson, the former head of the S.E.C., has warned that "disaster" looms if hedge funds aren't regulated. The title of a recent column made the point nicely: "Instruments of Satan."

That's not quite what Alfred Winslow Jones had in mind when he started the first hedge fund, in 1949. Looking to make money in both up and down markets, Jones adopted a strategy of buying some stocks and selling others short. Because, at the time, mutual funds were legally barred from selling stocks short, Jones avoided government regulations by restricting participation in the fund to a small number of wealthy investors. In the half century since, hedge funds have moved a long way beyond Jones's simple "long-short" approach, and they now pursue a dizzying array of investment tactics in nearly every market in the world. But they have retained a few of the original characteristics: they're free to invest in whatever assets they want; they can buy those assets with borrowed money, using leverage to improve their returns; they generally have long "lock-up" periods for their investors' money; and, if they are successful, the people responsible earn vast fortunes.

Aside from the part about vast fortunes, that doesn't sound especially demonic. But hedge funds are easy to hate. They're secretive, rarely making public disclosures about their investments or their performance, and so are fertile terrain for fraud and incompetence. Last year, investors in a fund called the Bayou Group found out that its managers had been lying about its performance for years, having blown all the money on bad investments. Hedge funds often trade in markets—and with investment strategies—that few investors understand. Many critics suspect hedge funds of hunting in packs: conspiring to bring down ailing companies or currencies, or artificially inflating the price of commodities. Worst of all, the funds' reliance on leverage increases the scale of disaster when things go wrong. In 1998, the collapse of Long-Term Capital Management, a giant hedge fund that had made huge leveraged bets on currencies and government bonds, exacerbated a global financial crisis.

Yet hedge funds have been far more of a boon to financial markets than a bane. Markets work best when investors are drawing on diverse sources of information and relying on many different kinds of tools to figure out what's going to happen next. The sheer variety of investing strategies that hedge funds use—in contrast to mutual funds, whose managers mostly just buy stocks and bonds—enhances the diversity of markets. In the U.S. stock market, hedge funds' willingness to sell stocks short also makes the market smarter and more efficient.



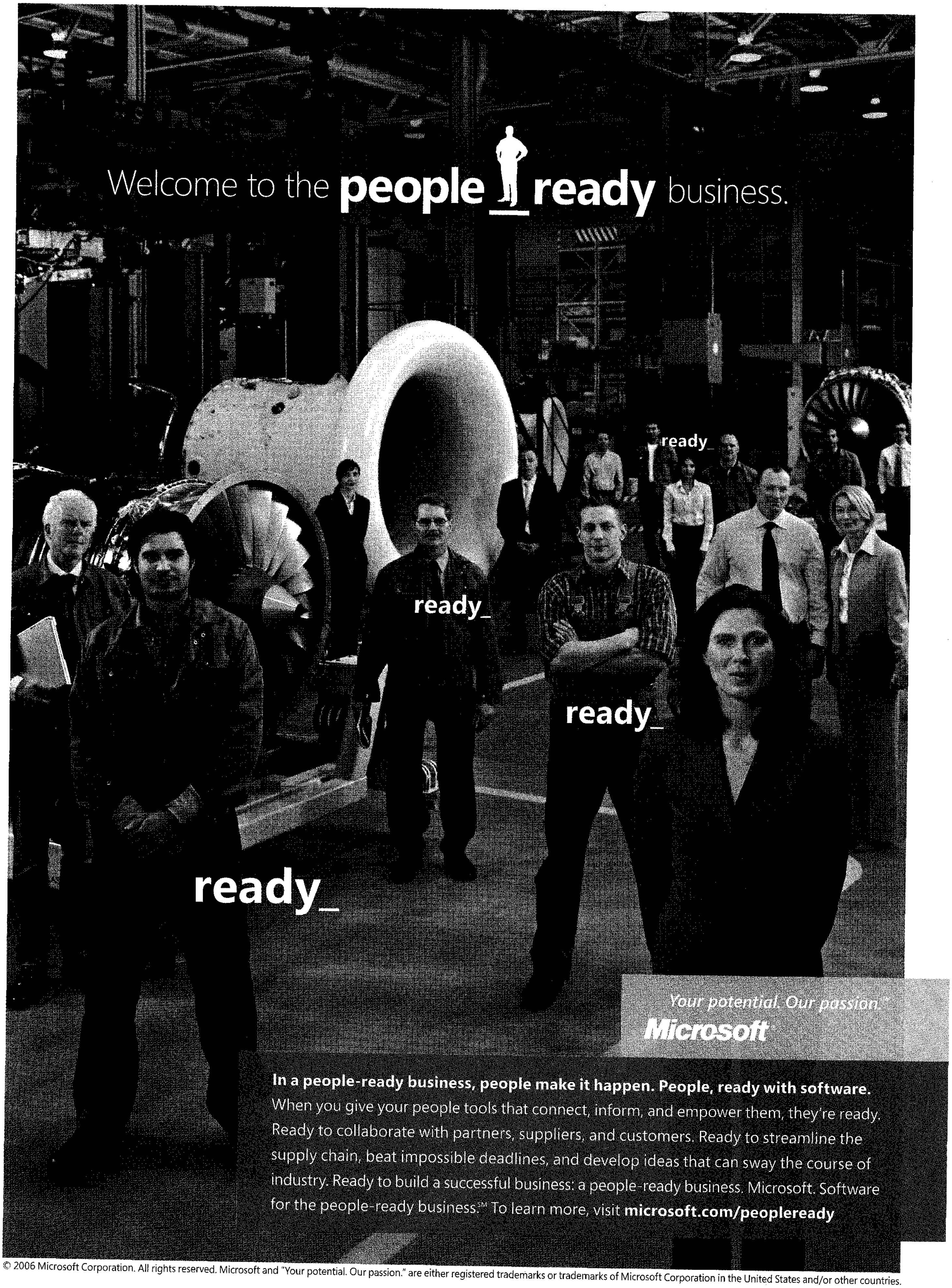
Paradoxically, some of the characteristics of hedge funds that make them seem frightening also make them valuable. Secrecy, for instance, makes it harder for hedge-fund managers to imitate what their peers are doing, a common flaw among mutual-fund managers. And, because investors in hedge funds typically have to give notice of a month or more before withdrawing their money, managers are freer to pursue contrarian trading strategies that may work only over the long term. That doesn't mean that hedge funds are immune to trends: a year ago, a number of big hedge funds suffered major losses from a bad bet on G.M.'s stocks and bonds. But a series of academic studies has found scant evidence of the pack mentality that hedge funds are often accused of. A recent paper by the economists Burton Malkiel and Atanu Saha, for instance, showed that the range of performance among hedge-fund managers was much wider than among mutual-fund managers, which suggests that they're operating more independently.

Hedge funds are speculators, and we think of speculators as contributing to volatile markets and wild price spikes. But a recent study of eleven commodities markets found that when speculators made up forty per cent or more of the market, prices were roughly half as volatile as they were in markets where speculative trading was less prevalent. Similarly, a study published by the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland says that hedge funds tend "to reduce, not increase, the volatility of price," something that the authors attribute to the funds' willingness to go against the prevailing wisdom. It's probably no accident that in the past three years, as hedge funds have made an increasingly large percentage of stock-market trades, market indexes have become far less volatile.

So what's the catch? Only this: while the proliferation of hedge funds may be good for markets, it may not be good for their clients. The more funds there are trying to make money, the harder it is to get an edge. Even if hedge funds have done well in the past (and that's an ongoing debate), no one disputes that hedge-fund performance has declined as the hedge-fund boom has got under way. The investors who have given hedge funds billions of dollars in capital in the past few years may end up without much to show for it. It's their loss, but it's our gain.

—*James Surowiecki*

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN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ANNALS OF RELIGION

HOLLYWOOD HERESY

Marketing "The Da Vinci Code" to Christians.

BY PETER J. BOYER

In the three years since the publication of Dan Brown's "The Da Vinci Code," a best-selling suspense novel with pretensions to serious scholarship, the work has inspired a vast literature of refutation, including dozens of books and numberless essays disputing the story's core contentions. The Internet, intrinsically hospitable to such a purpose, has grown a busy marketplace of "Da Vinci" debunkers, anticipating the big-budget film version of Brown's tale, now arriving in theatres. Prospective moviegoers who have spent time at a Web site called The Da Vinci Dialogue, the most polished of these efforts, have been informed that the story is deeply anti-Christian, a pseudo history "fraught with inaccuracies" and "spiritual tripe." They have been offered the opinion that, of its type, the book was only "moderately engaging," attracting fans who were easily gulled and perhaps just a bit dim.

What is striking about these assertions is that they are part of a marketing project paid for by Sony Pictures Entertainment, the studio that has invested more than two hundred million dollars in producing "The Da Vinci Code" and distributing and marketing it worldwide. When Sony acquired the rights to the book, in June of 2003, it was the property that Hollywood most dearly coveted, a certain blockbuster with sequel potential, and the reported six-million-dollar deal that Sony made with Brown was seen as a triumph. The article in *Daily Variety* announcing the deal suggested no hint of possible religious controversy in the "Da Vinci Code" story, describing it as a murder mystery with "clues to a 2,000-year-old conspiracy encoded in the paintings of Leonardo Da Vinci." John Calley, the Sony executive who made the deal, described the book as a "page-turner" and a "thrill ride" that seemed to have been written for the screen.

If, in retrospect, Hollywood seems to have been oblivious of the risk of the film's arousing religious ire, it was only reflecting the attitude that had greeted the publication of the book. Reviewers had generally praised the novel, calling it a brainy entertainment and, as sales piled up, marvelling at its broad appeal; somehow, the provocations at its heart were almost uniformly overlooked. Brown's puzzler plot proceeded from a thesis that Christianity as we know it is history's greatest scam, perpetrated by a malignant, misogynist, and, when necessary, murderous Catholic Church. "Almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is *false*," one of the book's main characters declares.

Two developments soon brought that aspect of "The Da Vinci Code" into sharper focus, and changed the dynamic of the Sony project. One was the realization by Church leaders that Dan Brown's legion of fans included many of the Christian faithful, and that a large proportion of them believed that some—or, perhaps, even all—of the book's assertions were true. The other development was unfolding just a few miles west of the Sony studios, in an editing room in Santa Monica, where Mel Gibson was fashioning an early version of his sanguinary vision of Christ's Passion.

There is nothing outwardly ominous about the building at Lexington Avenue and East Thirty-fourth Street, a handsome seventeen-story red-brick-and-limestone tower, that is the American headquarters of the Prelature of Opus Dei. But when I asked a nearby shopkeeper about the place he grew apprehensive. "Opus Dei, dude—I'm scared of those people," he said. "In all honesty, I read something in 'The Da Vinci Code' that disturbed me as a Christian. This self-mortification, this self-mutilation, where they tie this band around their thighs and hit themselves in the back with a rope. You know, that shit's crazy, dog."

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candidates for a religious order, with a critical core (about twenty-five per cent) pledging celibacy and living together in gender-segregated Opus Dei centers, such as the building on Thirty-fourth Street. (The women's portion of the building is entered from Lexington Avenue.) Opus Dei now has eighty-seven thousand members worldwide, with about three thousand in the United States. (Its traditional rival, the Jesuits, an order of Catholic priests and brothers, claims about twenty thousand.) A little more than half the members are women, and the great majority, called "supernumeraries," are married and, apart from the intensity of their devotion, lead conventional lives.

A sizable proportion of Opus Dei members, under the guidance of a spiritual director, voluntarily take up the practice of corporal mortification, wearing the cilice for two hours most days and using the discipline. (Both items are produced in monasteries.) Father William Stetson, who runs the Catholic Information Center, in Washington, D.C., and who joined Opus Dei in the mid-nineteen-fifties, when he was at Harvard Law School, says that he learned the larger meaning of corporal mortification the first week he joined. "I understood that what was being demanded of me was an ascetical practice," he says. "Not just the cilice and the disciplines but an austerity of life, living in the middle of the world." Stetson and others frequently point out that corporal mortification, which may seem a throwback to medieval mysticism, was not uncommon even among recent exemplars of spiritual piety. Mother Teresa of Calcutta wore a cilice and used the discipline, telling her Sisters, "If I am sick, I take five strokes. I must feel its need in order to share in the Passion of Christ and the sufferings of our poor."

Pope John Paul II particularly favored Opus Dei, and in 1982 accorded the community the status of "personal prelature," a sort of worldwide jurisdiction unbounded by the geographical lines that define a diocese. Members are extremely loyal to the Pope, and to Church orthodoxy. Dan Brown's novel portrays Opus Dei as a powerful force for regression, which is exactly how the prelature is seen by Vatican II-era pro-

The "Da Vinci" phenomenon cuts across both Christian and Hollywood orthodoxies.

BARRY BLITT

Such a comment suggests that the Catholic Church and other Christian leaders might be justified in their concerns that readers of "The Da Vinci Code" are taking the book too seriously. The shopkeeper's comment referred to a character named Silas, an albino Opus Dei "monk," whose zealous piety expresses itself as sadomasochism and a willingness to kill (even a nun) for God. It is through Silas that Brown introduces his readers to the practice of corporal mortification—self-inflicted pain as an avenue to deeper spirituality—and the devices employed to achieve it, a barbed belt worn around the thigh (called a cilice) and a knotted rope (the discipline). In one scene in the book, Silas, preparing for a night of doing God's dirty work, strips naked and cinches his cilice until it cuts deeper into his flesh, then repeatedly whips himself until, "finally, he felt the blood begin to flow." Then he goes out and vandalizes a church and commits another murder, for the cause.

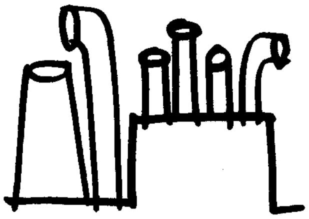
Brown employs the Silas character to convey an impression of Opus Dei as the cultish, invisible hand within the Catholic Church, a view that is held by many, both inside the Church and out. Opus Dei is a unique community, begun in 1928 by a Spanish priest named Josemaría Escrivá, who envisioned a world made holier by a cadre of deeply pious laypeople committed to expressing their spiritual devotion through their everyday work in the secular world. That, Escrivá believed, was truly God's work—*opus dei.* Members undertake rigorous theological and spiritual formation, something like that of gressive Catholics, whose hopes for reform (such as the admission of women into the priesthood and a more liberal policy on contraception) have long been frustrated. As John Paul neared death, Father Richard McBrien, of the University of Notre Dame, a consistent liberal voice, said that one of his complaints against John Paul was his affinity for Opus Dei. "Opus Dei is as close to a fascist organization [as there is] in the Catholic Church," he told me last year. "They're a very, very definite, militant, ultra-conservative group in the Church, who are basically trying to undo the work of the Second Vatican Council. In this Pope, they had a willing ally, because there was a quid pro quo. They gave him a lot of money and a lot of support for his efforts, going way back, to support the Solidarity movement in Poland. And they had a great influence in John Paul's pontificate."

That deeply critical view of Opus Dei is reflected by Brown in "The Da Vinci Code," except that Brown's quid pro quo involves an Opus Dei bailout of the Vatican bank, repaid, in part, by fast-tracked sainthood for Father Escrivá. (The Vatican canonized Escrivá in 2002.) Opus Dei insists that the "Da Vinci Code" portrait of the group is malicious nonsense, but the larger worry is how much of the rest of the book readers will take as gospel. "The distortions that 'The Da Vinci Code' has in it about Christ, the Church, Christianity in general are a source of deeper concern than any misrepresentation of Opus Dei," Peter Bancroft, the group's national communications director, says. "The Church won't stand or fall on whether Opus Dei exists or not. But whether Christ is divine is central."

The premise of Brown's story is that Jesus of Nazareth was, in the words of a "Da Vinci" character, "a great and powerful man, but a *man* nonetheless. A mortal." The Brown theology—asserted, lecture style, in speeches by two of his main characters, both scholars—holds that Jesus was a proto-feminist married to Mary of Magdala, his favorite disciple and the mother of his offspring. This Jesus preached a message that was in harmony with goddess worship, and the early Christians practiced a life-affirming faith devoted to the "sacred feminine" until, in the fourth century, a Catholic power play replaced this true Christianity with the patriarchal, sin-and-atonement version. According to Brown, the softer Christianity's books were burned by the Church, as were five million of its more assertive women—"female scholars, priestesses, gypsies, mystics, nature lovers," and the like. Even so, this original Christian Church could not be wiped out, and left clues everywhere telling of the sacred feminine—not only in Leonardo's work (the artist was in on the secret) but even in church architecture. (The entrance of a Gothic cathedral, one of Brown's characters observes, is like a vagina, "complete with receding labial ridges and a nice little cinquefoil clitoris above the doorway.")

While secular critics and Hollywood producers plainly saw Brown's story as a mystery that happened to have some religious material in it, the Church saw the book as an anti-Christian (and, particularly, anti-Catholic) polemic disguised as a beach read. As church leaders, Protestant and Catholic, increasingly heard questions from their congregants about "Da Vinci" postulations, book sales skyrocketed—to date, more than sixty million copies have been printed, in forty-four languages—and Sony set out to make the movie. The Christians were broadly united in their opposition to the book, and to the movie, but badly divided on the question of how to deal with it.

Mainstream Hollywood has an orthodoxy of its own, upheld in some quarters as insistently as that of any church, and by the fall of 2003 Mel Gibson had come to be regarded as a deeply misguided, perhaps even dangerous, heretic. His movie about the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Christ was still in the cutting room, but Hollywood already knew more than enough, from accounts of a bootlegged screenplay, to render judgment. Gibson's vision of Jesus' last hours, reflecting what he considered a literal reading of the Gospels, offended progressive Christian scholars, Jewish groups concerned about anti-Semitism, and secular opinion writers. For people in the film business, an even greater offense, perhaps, was Gibson's putting his own money into the film—one that used relatively unknown actors, speaking lines written in dead languages. This seemed the act of someone who had truly lost his bearings, and Gibson began to feel the sting of ostracism in a community that had once given him a Best Picture Oscar. Major studios shunned the project; producers were quoted anonymously as saying that they wouldn't work with him again; and he was snubbed at his Beverly Hills cigar club.

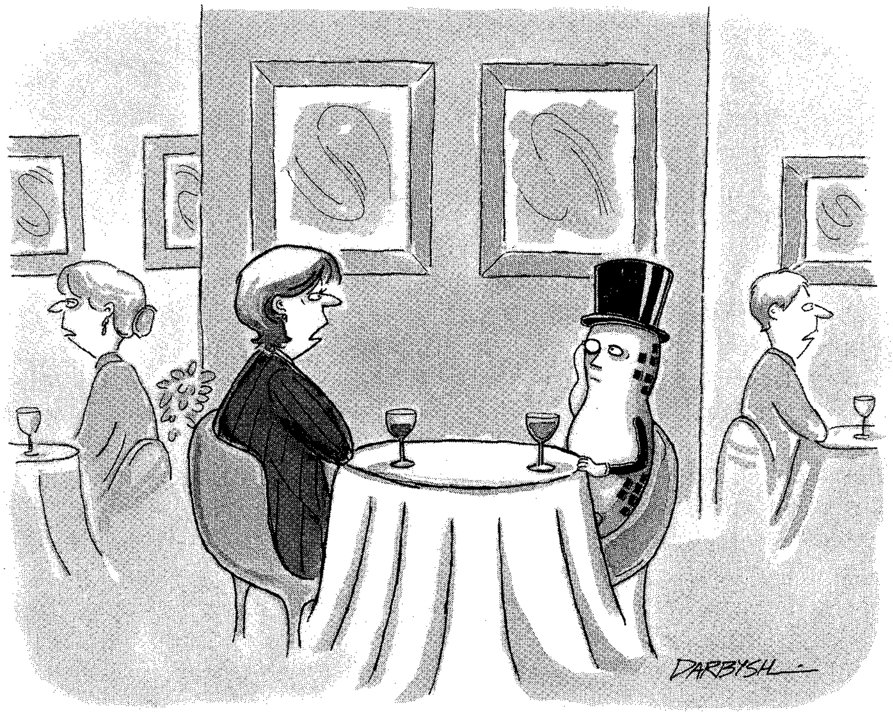


But it was still the movie business, which meant that somewhere in all the negative publicity there was a marketing opportunity. Gibson seized it, through the services of a man named Paul Lauer, a Catholic who sensed that opprobrium aimed at Gibson by the press and by Hollywood people could be leveraged to Gibson's advantage. Lauer worked the Catholic network, arranging private screenings of "The Passion of the Christ" for friendly archbishops and Knights of Columbus chapters, personally attended by Gibson. Lauer urged Gibson to reach out to evangelical Protestants, who had long felt estranged from popular culture, and who now embraced the Hollywood star for standing on their side of the culture divide. After Gibson showed clips from his film to a convention of Pentecostals in Anaheim, members of the crowd laid hands on him and prayed for his success. Gibson's film became a Christian cause, and when it opened, on Ash Wednesday, 2004, church groups that had bought ticket blocks filled the theatres; some houses were sold out for several days. "The Passion of the Christ," scorned by critics and rejected by establishment studios, provided Gibson with a revenge that spoke clearly to Hollywood—a domestic box-office return of three hundred and seventy million dollars.

Eight months after "The Passion" arrived, the born-again President was reëlected over Hollywood's candidate, greatly helped by the alliance of evangelicals and Catholics who had flocked to Gibson's film. Suddenly, people like Paul Lauer and A. Larry Ross, the publicity man for Billy Graham and Rick Warren, who helped with "Passion," were getting calls from producers, asking their advice on how to market their films. Scripts were vetted for content that might offend Christians, who had become the hot new market segment. Producers began using terms like "Christian values" without irony.

It was at this moment, in November, 2004, that Sony moved toward production on "The Da Vinci Code." The studio had hired Ron Howard to direct the film and Tom Hanks as its star, safe choices who were not likely to botch the project's blockbuster inevitability by going arty. But the environment had changed dramatically since Sony acquired the property. Dan Brown's best-seller was now under steady assault, its theology attacked by a series of books bearing titles such as "De-Coding Da Vinci" and "Breaking the Da Vinci Code," which deconstructed Brown's scholarship and convincingly refuted many of his key claims (such as Christ's divinity having been decided by the fourth-century Council of Nicaea, on a close vote). Brown's art scholarship was also broadly assailed. The *Times* published a critique of "The Da Vinci Code" by the Renaissance art expert Bruce Boucher, who gently mocked Brown's "shaky" grasp of the historical Leonardo (pointing out, for example, that the artist's name was not "Da Vinci"). Boucher concluded his article by suggesting that "The Da Vinci Code" might make a better opera than a film, offering the old advice that "if it's too silly to be said, it can always be sung."

Such confutation was notable, because the ostensible veracity of Brown's history, if not his theology, had been part of the book's allure. Brown had asserted this veracity both implicitly (through the device of assigning historical exposition to his fictional scholars) and explicitly (beginning the book with a "fact" page that erroneously asserted, for example, that his shadowy Priory of Sion—"a European secret society founded in 1099—is a real organization"). Book reviewers had praised his research, and Brown, in promoting the book, vouched for its validity; he told Charles Gibson, on "Good Morning America," that if the book had been nonfiction his factual assertions would not have changed.



"It's not you—it's my anaphylaxis."

• •

Meanwhile, Sony's fortunes seemed to have taken a downward turn. In 2003, its Ben Affleck–Jennifer Lopez movie, "Gigli," had tanked embarrassingly, and two big-budget sequels, "Bad Boys II" and "Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle," had not met expectations. The whole movie industry was entering a prolonged box-office slump. Sony needed "The Da Vinci Code" to be a hit, and it could not predict how an angry and motivated "Passion" constituency might affect the film's fate.

Sony decided not to take any chances. As it began to devise its marketing strategy for "Da Vinci," it hired the services of Sitrick & Company, a public-relations firm that specializes in reputation salvaging. The firm, whose unofficial slogan is "If you don't tell your story, someone else is going to tell it for you," worked with Rush Limbaugh after his revelation of prescription-drug addiction, and with the comedian Paula Poundstone when she was charged with child endangerment. Sony wanted Sitrick to manage any potential "Da Vinci" fallout. "It's not that big studios don't like controversy," Allan Mayer, Sitrick's managing director, told *Variety*. "What they fear is a controversy that gets out of control. And controversy gets out of control when people start using a movie as a tennis ball in their own match."

Darrell Bock, a research professor of New Testament Studies at the Dallas Theological Seminary, was on sabbatical in Tübingen, Germany, last summer when he received an e-mail from a Sony representative wishing to discuss a project connected to "The Da Vinci Code." This seemed odd, because Bock was the author of "Breaking the Da Vinci Code," the attack on Brown's scholarship, which had also reached the *Times* best-seller list. Bock agreed to meet with the Sony representative when he returned to the U.S. that fall.

The Sony strategy, following the Sitrick model, was to try to turn the controversy over "The Da Vinci Code" to the film's advantage. There was no way to stop a Christian critique of Brown's ideas, but, if leading Christian voices could somehow be coaxed into an association with the "Da Vinci" movie, the criticism might seem less like an attack and more like engagement. Many in Hollywood remembered the passionate reaction to Martin Scorsese's "The Last Temptation of Christ" (1988), which proved to be a public-relations nightmare for Universal. It was better, to paraphrase Lyndon Johnson, to have the Christians inside the theatre, discussing "Da Vinci," than outside, picketing.

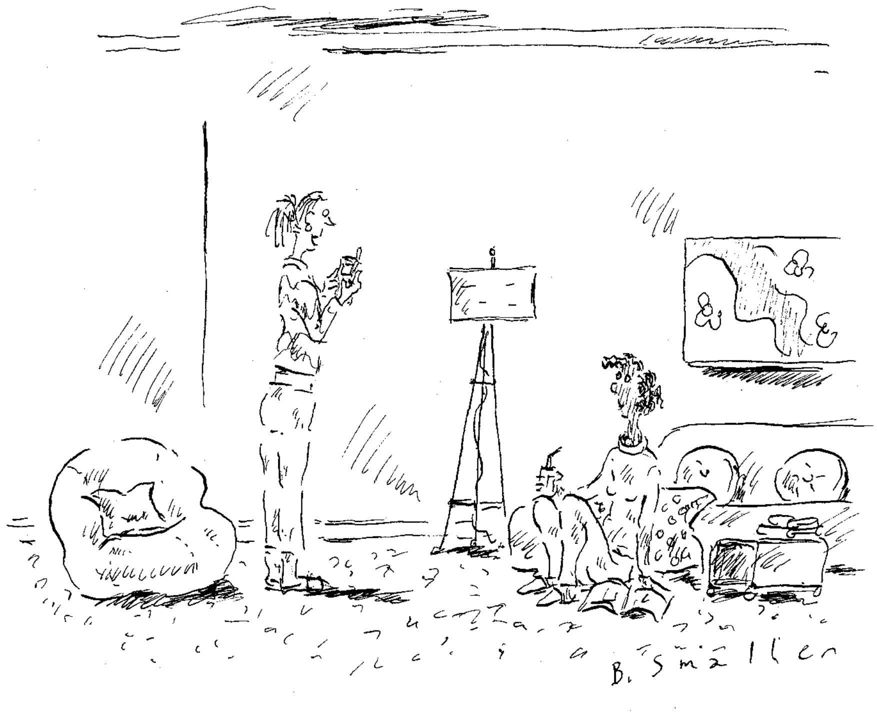
The man Sony chose for the task of shepherding Christian leaders to the Sony cause was Jonathan Bock, of Grace Hill Media, one of the new breed of faith-oriented consultants now thriving in Hollywood. It was he who had got in touch with Darrell Bock (they are not related) last summer, and with several dozen other such leaders. Jonathan Bock, a former studio publicist, had a demonstrated ability to translate Hollywood to the Christian faithful, and to explain Christians to movie people. He had a sophisticated understanding of the relatively small and interconnected circle of Christian opinion leaders, especially those in the new media. Where a studio executive might reflexively equate "Christian leader" with Jerry Falwell, Bock knew that, in important ways, this is a post-televangelist era; a few well-regarded Christian bloggers or scholars, fully conversant with popular culture, can have as much impact as any broadcast Jeremiah.

Christian critics, meanwhile, had yet to come up with a unified, coherent strategy to protest the movie. On Palm Sunday, a powerful cardinal urged a boycott of the film, saying that the book was "full of calumnies, offenses, and historical and theological errors," but there has been no official Church endorsement of his call. Bill Donohue, the president of the Catholic League, and a usually reliable volunteer in the culture conflicts, decided early on that he was not going to participate in any boycott of the film. "First of all, it's a useless exercise," he says. "The movie's going to be a box-office extravaganza the first weekend or two. After that, if it's a good movie it'll continue; if not, it'll fail." Donohue says that he is galled by Dan Brown's insistence on the book's factuality, and that he has asked Sony and Ron Howard to add a disclaimer to the film, labelling it as fiction. He says, "I have to be prudent. I want to win. This book has sold forty million copies. It's got Tom Hanks, Sony behind it, Ron Howard. To the extent that we can get the word out—'Look, go and be entertained, this is good fun, but this movie is a fable'—to that extent, that's about as good as I can get."

That ambivalence made Jonathan Bock's job—framing the dispute over the film on Sony's terms—much easier. In February, Bock launched The Da Vinci Dialogue, which contains some forty-five essays by religious leaders and Christian scholars questioning and correcting, in civil tones, various of Dan Brown's assertions. Opus Dei declined to participate in the site, but evangelicals have been eager to be heard. Darrell Bock, perhaps preëminent among the "Da Vinci" debunkers, contributed two essays to the site, and says that the Christian participation in the project reflects the community's growing sophistication in dealing with popular culture. "The Christian response this time around has been different," Bock says. "Rather than simply whining and complaining, although there are still elements that do that, there is a substantial group that says, No, on this one we're going to engage. So we're not going to talk boycott. We're not going to protest, we're simply going to take the facts that were presented in this novel and we're going to engage them, and we're going to try to show people that there's a good, substantive reply to what's going on here."

The theme of engagement has come to define the Christian response to "The Da Vinci Code" well beyond the Sony discourse. Ministers across the country have arranged discussion groups and courses of instruction tied to the questions raised by Brown's work, and even Opus Dei leaders now speak of it as a "teaching moment." Sony is undoubtedly pleased by this outcome. If Christian leaders are speaking of "dialogue" and "engagement," they are not saying, "Don't see this film." In the realm of damage control, that may be a serviceable definition of controlling the controversy.

That is precisely what annoys Barbara Nicolosi, a screenwriter and an influential Christian blogger, whose friendship with Jonathan Bock has been strained recently. She says that when she first heard that Bock was working with Sony on "The Da Vinci Code" she was optimistic. Bock's connection with the project suggested to her that Sony wanted to mollify Christians, and Nicolosi urged her friends and readers to withhold judgment on the film; perhaps Ron Howard and his screenwriter, Akiva



"My relationship with my mother has really improved, thanks to Caller I.D."

Goldsman, would not use the name Opus Dei, and would make the assertions about Jesus and Mary Magdalene seem more speculative and less factual. Then, she says, someone slipped her a version of the screenplay, and she realized that the studio's effort to engage in a dialogue with the faith community would be limited to the Da Vinci Dialogue Web site created by Bock. Nicolosi felt that Christians had been sold out, as she proceeded to make clear on her blog. "Christians being coaxed into writing anti-*DVC* pieces on a stupid web site . . . are meekly accepting that they are being given 'a seat at the table' in some grand cultural discussion," she wrote. "Duped! There is no seat, folks. There is no discussion. What there is, is a few P.R. folks in Hollywood taking mondo big bucks from Sony Pictures, to deliver legions of well-meaning Christians into subsidizing a movie that makes their own Savior out to be a sham."

Nicolosi says that those participating in the Sony project are debating "on Hell's terms," and she refers to the Web site's contributors, some of whom are her friends, as "useful Christian idiots."

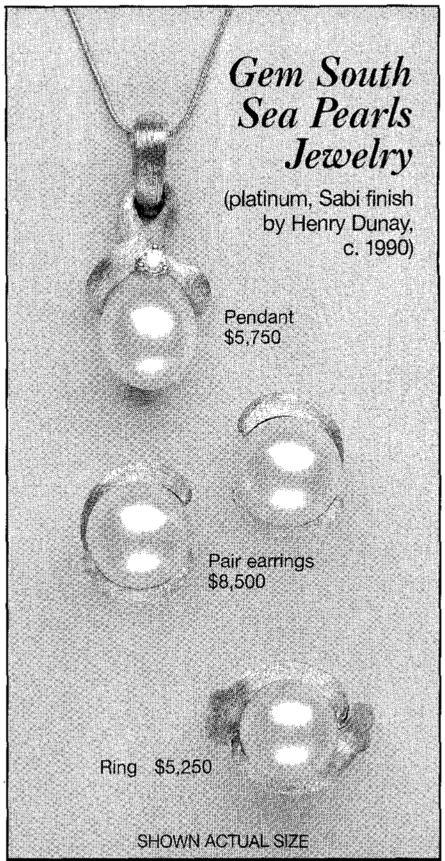
"I think that was actually applied to me," Craig Detweiler, a professor of mass communications at Biola University, an evangelical college near Los Angeles, says. Detweiler has written for the Dialogue site, and has spoken admiringly of Dan Brown's book—publicly posing the question "How can forty million readers be wrong?" Detweiler acknowledges that the Christian community in Hollywood is divided over the film. "I think there are just very differing levels of offense taken at the novel," he says. "Some are able to sort it out and say, 'You know what? It's a novel, it's fiction.' And I believe that the average moviegoer and reader can figure that out." He also says that the different responses suggest a Catholic-Protestant divide. "The accusation that Jesus might have been married—to many people, that's kind of an interesting notion. It doesn't affect their faith significantly, one way or the other. To someone who's taken a vow of celibacy and put on a collar, that is a very large foundational challenge. So it's understandable why that has maybe crossed a line for certain members of the Christian community."

Nicolosi, who is Catholic, says that the divisions among Christians prove her point about Dan Brown's book and the Sony movie. "It's demonic," she says. "I've seen so much evidence, in the fact that people who were friends five months ago are now totally at each other's throats." Nicolosi may yet have the last word; she has written a screenplay about the life of the Opus Dei founder, Josemaría Escrivá, and she would be helped by a "Da Vinci Code" success.

If the movie is not the blockbuster promised by the book's performance, it will not be the fault of Sony's marketing campaign. The studio has certainly deflected, or mitigated, direct criticism of the movie, which, by all indications, follows the book closely. The Catholic League will not get its disclaimer, and Opus Dei will be prominently, and darkly, represented. One measure of how well the campaign worked is that by last week Sony's television ads for the movie carried the tagline "The most controversial thriller of our time."

As it happens, the "Da Vinci Code" experience has provided Opus Dei itself with a valuable marketing tutorial. After initially considering a lawsuit against Brown or Sony, the prelature decided instead to take advantage of the publicity. The red brick building at Thirty-fourth and Lexington has been opened to reporters, and so many tourists stop by that the prelature began leaving recruitment literature by the front entrance. Opus Dei redesigned its Web site, making it more user-friendly, and has posted a list of "Da Vinci Code" corrections. (Regarding Opus Dei "monks," such as Silas, the prelature notes, "Like all Catholics, Opus Dei members have great appreciation for monks, but in fact there are no monks in Opus Dei.") The Web site has received more than three million visitors, and Peter Bancroft, Opus Dei's national communications director, says that some of the curious have now become members. The Silas wannabes are generally screened out.

"It's odd, really," Bancroft says. "Every once in a while, we get an e-mail from somebody who's really fascinated by the cilice and the discipline, and says he would like to join up if he can use them. And that's not the kind of person that we're looking for." ♦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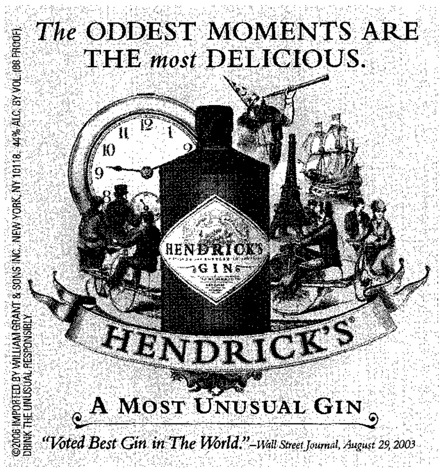
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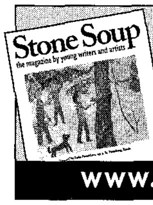

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Building a better sugar substitute.

BY BURKHARD BILGER

The substance in the flask seemed to have all the makings of an excellent insecticide. It was a fine crystalline powder, easy to imagine spraying over a field, and its molecules were full of chlorine atoms, like DDT. To make it, Shashikant Phadnis, a young Indian chemist at Queen Elizabeth College, in London, and his adviser, Leslie Hough, had begun by taking an eyedropper full of sulfuryl chloride—a highly toxic chemical—and adding it to a sugar solution, one drop at a time. In the violent reaction that followed, a wholly new compound was born: 1', 4, 6, 6'-tetrachloro-1', 4, 6, 6'-tetradeoxy*galacto*sucrose.

On that late-summer day in 1975, Phadnis was told to test the powder, but he misunderstood: he thought that he needed to *taste* it. And so, using a small spatula, he put a little of it on the tip of his tongue. It was sweet—achingly sweet. "When I reported my findings to Les, he asked if I was crazy," Phadnis remembers. "How could I taste compounds without knowing anything about their toxicity?" Before long, though, Hough was so delighted with the substance that he dubbed it Serendipitose and tried putting some in his coffee. "Oh, forget it," he said, when Phadnis reminded him that it might be toxic. "We'll survive!"

Over the next year, Hough and Phadnis worked with the British sugar company Tate & Lyle to make more than a hundred chlorinated sugars, finally settling on one that had three chlorine atoms and was about six hundred times as sweet as sugar. "It isn't of any use as an insecticide," Hough told me recently. "That was tested." But it has proved useful as a food. In its pure form, it is known as sucralose. When mixed with fillers and sold in bright-yellow sachets, it's known as Splenda, the best-selling artificial sweetener in America.

Humans are biologically predisposed to crave sweet things.

LAURIE ROSENWALD

People will eat almost anything, it seems, as long as it's sweet. And, until fairly recently, this mental programming served them just fine. When Columbus introduced cane to the New World, the anthropologist Sidney Mintz has noted, sugar was an exotic luxury. Most Europeans had never eaten sugar, but they quickly developed a taste for it. By 1700, the Americas had become a vast sugar mill and the English were eating four pounds per person per year. By 1800, they were eating eighteen pounds; by 1900, ninety pounds. But nowhere was the rise of sugar as dramatic as in the New World. Last year, the average American consumed about a hundred and forty pounds of cane sugar, corn syrup, and other natural sugars—fifty per cent more than the Germans or the French and nine times as much as the Chinese.

Artificial sweeteners are both a symptom of this craving and an attempt to curb it. Some two hundred million Americans now use them, but rarely with much enthusiasm. Like Splenda, the most popular products were all discovered by accident; none of them taste much like sugar; and there is no final verdict on their safety. Saccharin was found over dinner in 1879, by a chemist who was working with coal-tar derivatives and forgot to wash his hands properly. It's used in Sweet'N Low in the United States, where it was listed as a possible carcinogen until 2000, and is still banned as a food additive in Canada. Aspartame, which is used in Equal and most diet sodas, was found in 1965, by a chemist who was testing new drugs for gastric ulcers and licked his fingers before picking up a piece of paper. A recent study by the National Cancer Institute found no evidence that aspartame caused cancer in people, but an Italian study found that it caused cancer in rats. Sucralose was declared safe by the Food and Drug Administration in 1998, but most taste researchers I talked to won't eat it. "I look at that structure and I have an irrational fear of it," one of them said. "I've seen the safety studies, and you feed it to rats and mice forever and nothing happens. But it just scares me."

Inventing a sweetener with even a little of sugar's appeal is one of the hardest tasks in food science. It's less like imitating the taste of Coke or vanilla than like trying to imitate water—

another simple but astonishingly versatile compound. Sugar's sweetness only begins to explain our devotion to it. You can freeze it, cook it, candy it, and caramelize it. It adds bulk to baked goods and helps them to brown. Sugar is a powerful preservative. It triggers the taste buds almost instantly, fades quickly without aftertaste, and has a voluptuous mouthfeel. Even its potency can't easily be improved. Artificial sweeteners may be thousands of times as sweet by volume, but their flavor loses intensity with repeated tasting. Sugar stays sweet.

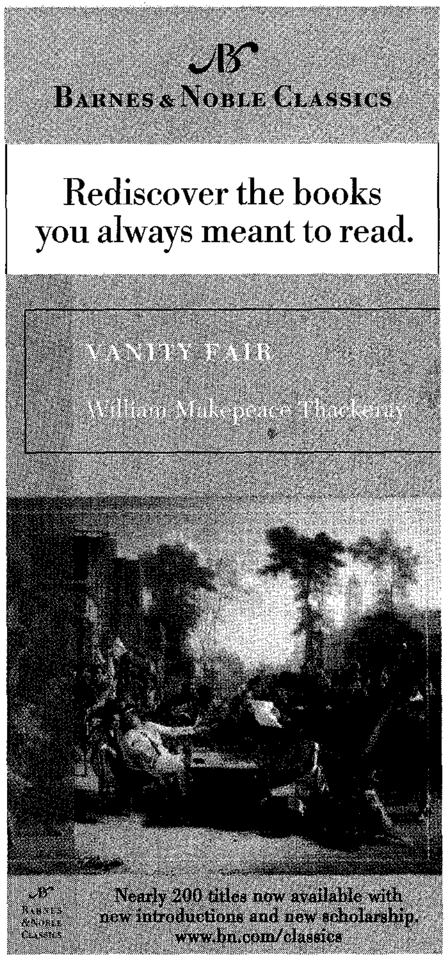
Of course, sugar can also make you fat, put diabetics into a coma, and make your children run screaming in circles. In the past twenty years, it has helped to double the number of obese Americans and rotted untold millions of teeth. Sugar may be the single most unhealthy part of the American diet, yet until recently there was little hope of finding a tastier, more wholesome substitute. Thousands of chemicals were known to be sweet, but none of them tasted or behaved like sugar. If all artificial sweeteners had been discovered by accident, the reason was simple: No one knew how to make them from scratch.

In the early nineteen-eighties, the NutraSweet Corporation launched what would become a twenty-year effort to find a better sweetener. The company's first product, aspartame, had been introduced in 1981 and had quickly become America's best-selling sugar substitute. Because it was composed of two common amino acids, aspartame was advertised, at first, as an almost natural product—"If you've had bananas and milk, you've eaten what's in NutraSweet." But aspartame also had problems. It couldn't be used in baking, because it broke down under high heat, and it tended to lose its sweetness over time. NutraSweet had higher hopes for its successor. "Sugar is in trouble," the company's president, Robert Shapiro, said. "You can't do anything to improve the product."

The search for Sweetener 2000, as it was later known, turned into a race of sorts between two groups on opposite sides of the Atlantic. In Mount Prospect, Illinois, outside Chicago, Shapiro had assembled a team of more than a hundred chemists, taste researchers, and support staff. The NutraSweet scientists knew that the tongue's taste buds are made up of clumps of fifty to a hundred cells, layered like an onion and tipped by chemical receptors. But they weren't sure how many kinds of receptors there were, how they functioned, or how they sent their signals to the brain. So the team worked by trial and error. They began by building computer models of existing sweetener molecules, modified them a few atoms at a time, and then fed the most promising candidates to mice. If the mice didn't "drop dead," as one member of the team put it recently, the compounds were sent to an outside lab for a series of sweetness tests, culminating in a fifteen-member taste panel.

In France, meanwhile, Claude Nofre and Jean-Marie Tinti, two chemists at Claude Bernard University, in Lyons, were searching for sweeteners in a more old-fashioned way. Nofre had come to NutraSweet's attention when he invented a potent substance called super-aspartame. Although it didn't seem to be toxic, super-aspartame had some unsettling similarities to cyanide, so NutraSweet gave Nofre a grant to try again. The funding wasn't enough to pay for computer modelling or elaborate taste tests, so Nofre and Tinti relied on Tinkertoy-type molecular models, on Nofre's instincts for the inner workings of taste buds, and on the evidence of their own tongues. "We tasted all of the compounds, all of them!" Nofre told me. "NutraSweet thought we were crazy." After seven years, the Mount Prospect team had identified around five hundred new sweeteners; Nofre and Tinti eventually found more than two thousand.

The winning compound, now called neotame, is a version of aspartame to which Nofre and Tinti attached a chain of carbon and hydrogen atoms. Neotame doesn't lose its flavor or break down when you cook with it, and it's about eight thousand times sweeter than sugar. In 2002, after more than a hundred human and animal studies, neotame was approved by the F.D.A. This year, it made its first appearance in American stores—in Ice Breakers candies, SunnyD Reduced Sugar orange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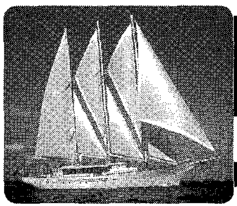
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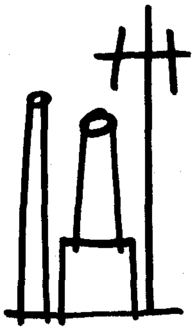
drink, Mr. Fizz sodas from Wal-Mart—and will now be judged by the only standard that really matters: how it tastes.

NutraSweet's test kitchen in Chicago, where its new products are developed, is on the ninth floor of a labyrinthine office building downtown. Known as the Sweet Spot, it's staffed by a team of "beverage formulators" in white lab coats and looks like the set of an industrial video from the nineteen-fifties—fluorescent lights, vinyl floor, and Formica counters bristling with scales, homogenizers, refractometers, pH meters, and other electronic gizmos. When I went there in January, for a taste test of neotame, I was met by Craig Petray, the company's chief executive, and Ihab Bishay, the director of research. Petray, who is forty-five, has a linebacker's build, a clean-shaven head, and an almost soldierly faith in his sweeteners. While he cited statistics and sales strategies, Bishay—a plump, genial Egyptian with a black goatee and rectangular glasses—quietly laid out the scientific evidence.



He began by setting nine plastic cups in front of me, each one filled with water flavored with a different artificial sweetener. The cups were a miniature overview of the global sweetener market. If their sizes had corresponded to actual consumption, the one with saccharin in it would have been by far the largest, with about sixty per cent of the total volume. The one with aspartame would have been next, with about twenty per cent, and the rest would have been tiny. Sucralose, the sweetener in Splenda, accounts for less than five per cent of worldwide consumption, although it has conquered the tabletop market in the United States. Neotame claims less than one per cent, most of that in China. Sugar wasn't in the lineup, but its cup would have dwarfed the rest: last year alone, almost three hundred billion pounds of sugar was consumed worldwide—about three times more than all other sweeteners combined. Clearly, neotame had a lot of convincing to do.

The tasting that followed felt a bit like "To Tell the Truth"—the old game show where celebrity panelists had to identify the bona-fide contestant from among a group of impostors. One by one, the sugar substitutes gave themselves away with the equivalent of a thick foreign accent or a laughably inauthentic manner. Saccharin had sugar's quick punch and lack of aftertaste but was accompanied by a mildly bitter or metallic edge. So were cyclamate and acesulfame-K, two sweeteners often used in place of saccharin. Aspartame and sucralose didn't have any off flavors, but their sweetness came on too slowly and stuck around too long. Tagatose, a low-calorie carbohydrate made from lactose, tasted nearly identical to sugar—its chemical structure is quite similar—but even in moderate quantities it acted as a laxative. "Don't drink too much," Petray said. "The plane trip will not be comfortable," Bishay added.

Worst of all were the sweeteners found in health-food stores. Stevia, made from a South American shrub of the same name, seemed to combine all the failings of its artificial cousins: slow onset, heavy aftertaste, bitterness, and other disagreeable flavors. (Monsanto, NutraSweet's former owner, considered genetically modifying stevia in order to make it less bitter, but the project was self-defeating: stevia's only real selling point is its natural quality.) Thaumatin, derived from the West African *katemfe* fruit, was said to be two thousand times as sweet as sugar, but it tasted like nothing at first. Then, slowly, like the opening chords of a Wagner overture, the flavor began to build: deep and faintly dissonant, with echoes of licorice and cough syrup. Chewing-gum makers often add thaumatin to round off flavors and make them last longer, but taken alone, at a high concentration, it was truly awful.

"This is the whole world of sweeteners," Bishay said. "These are the primary candidates, and there's no really good one. They are not the answer." That left neotame. Its taste was strong, clean, and straightforward—like aspartame, with a deeper bottom—but it took a while to register on the tongue and lingered forever. Its molecules seemed to lock onto the taste receptors so stubbornly that later arrivals had nowhere to bind; by the fourth or fifth sip, the water was nearly tasteless. If I'd been chewing stevia leaves or *katemfe* fruit all my life, neotame might have seemed like a great improvement. But I hadn't. When I sipped some sugar water afterward, the taste came as a blessing: bright, vivid, quick-blossoming, with unexpected hints of fruit and flowers. It wasn't hard to see why Europeans in the Middle Ages considered sugar not a staple but a spice.

"Pretty good sweetener, this sugar," Petray said, with a resigned smile. NutraSweet had given up on finding a true replacement for it, he added: there would be no successor to neotame. Instead, the company was focussing on blending sweeteners in order to minimize their weaknesses, then mixing them with sugar to get the same taste with fewer calories. This was where neotame came into its own. It cost a tenth as much as sugar and half as much as sucralose. It had no off-putting flavors, and it heightened the tastes of other foods much as sugar did. "We think the sweetener world in the future is going to be a blend world," Petray said.

He set three more cups in front of me, filled with orange soda. One or two were made with natural sugars; one or two were sweetened with a mixture of sugars, neotame, and acesulfame-K. My job was to pick the soda that tasted different from the two others. "Triangle tests" like this were harder than straight comparisons, Petray said, and this blend was one of NutraSweet's best. Acesulfame-K's quick bite offset neotame's slow, lingering sweetness. Still, I had no trouble telling the sodas apart. Petray and Bishay tried again, with different blends, replacing as little as twenty per cent of the sugars. They even brought out two cakes that Bishay's wife had made—one with sugar, one with a neotame blend. The cakes managed to fool me, but in every other case I easily spotted the outlier. "In a taste panel, this would pass every time," Petray told me at one point, a bit exasperated. "As an average consumer, there is no way you would say it was different." But to my taste, that day, there was still no replacement for sugar.

Humans are connoisseurs of sweetness. No other species is so particular. Cats can't taste sugar; neither can many dogs. Most other animals can't taste artificial sweeteners. (We know this, in part, thanks to an enterprising Swiss anthropologist named Dieter Glaser, who has offered them to fish, hedgehogs, tree shrews, primates, elephants, horses, cows, sheep, pigs, dogs, cats, mice, birds, reptiles, kangaroos, and swamp wallabies.) But after a million years of devoted omnivorousness—of climbing trees, swatting at bees, and scouring the landscape for any hint of sugar—people can taste every sweetener, and they can tell them apart.

Charles Zuker, a molecular biologist at the University of California at San Diego, thinks that a craving so subtle and so deep can't be satisfied by trial and error. You can't just take chemical potshots at the tongue, he says. You have to isolate its taste receptors, understand how they work, and find ways to trigger them. Like Petray, Zuker doesn't think that sugar can be replaced. But the right chemical might do something even better, he says. It might make foods with less sugar taste just as sweet.

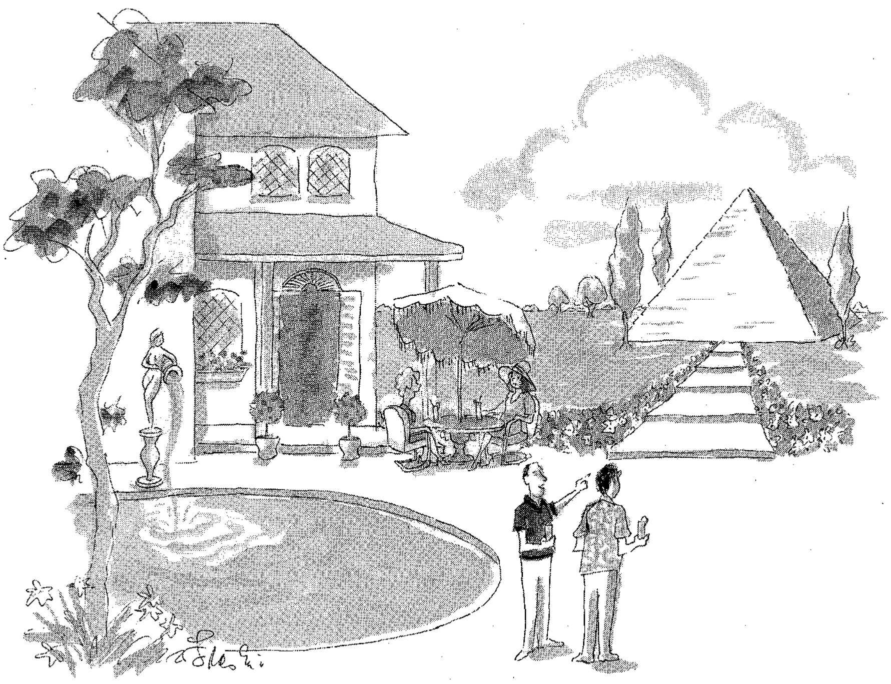
Zuker, whose name means "sugar" in Yiddish, give or take a consonant or two, jokes that he was destined to do this work. He was born in Chile, the grandson of Polish and Russian refugees from the Holocaust. He played with microscopes when most boys were playing soccer, and went to Jesuit school, although his family was Jewish. By the age of fifteen, he was in college, by nineteen he was attending graduate school at M.I.T., and by twenty-three he had earned his doctorate. Now forty-eight, he has dedicated his life to the senses, scientifically and otherwise. He owns a house on the cliffs above Del Mar, drives a Porsche Twin Turbo to work, and is married to his college sweetheart, a Spanish instructor at the university who resembles the actress Charo.

The first time I saw Zuker, he was giving the keynote address at a conference on the senses, in Washington, D.C. He was slouched at the podium in a suède jacket and weathered jeans, facing an audience of neuroscientists in suits. A pair of reading glasses was perched on his slender, balding head, and the Rolling Stones' tongue-and-lips logo was projected on a screen behind him. Until quite recently, he told the audience, the prevailing view of how taste receptors work was "idiotic." Most scientists believed that each cell in a taste bud carried receptors for all five basic flavors—sweet, sour, salty, bitter, and umami, the savory taste of protein. When food or drink passed over them, each cell sent an elaborately coded message to the brain, like a shortwave broadcast in five languages. "It made no sense," Zuker told me later. "Sweet and bitter prompt fundamentally different behaviors. Sweet is to determine caloric content; bitter is to warn you against toxins. It's the difference between life and death." Why would the same cell send both signals?

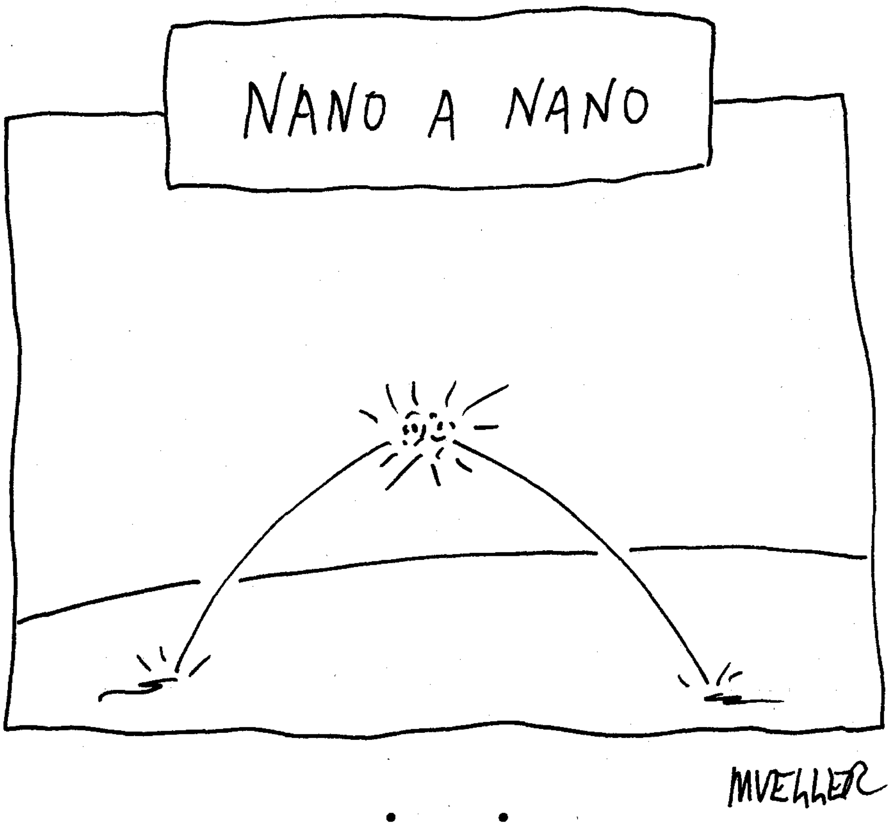
Zuker's laboratory in San Diego is stocked both with bottles of hazardous chemicals and with bags of exotic treats. On the day I visited, one of the tables was piled with Warheads: hard candies so sour that the package bore a picture of a puckered face with a mushroom cloud exploding from it. When I asked Zuker about them, he leaned back in his chair and curled one arm around his head. "The students bring in new sensory experiences every week," he said. "We had spicy ginger gummies last time." He told me to help myself to a bag of shrivelled Chinese wolfberries, on the counter. The berries had a sweet, strangely meaty flavor. After I'd had a few dozen, I asked him if there was any danger in eating too many. "We'll find out," Zuker said, grinning.

As a rule, today's students refuse to offer their tongues in the service of science, so Zuker keeps a large colony of mutant mice in a building across the street. Some of them can taste bitter but not sweet, others sweet but not bitter, and so on—more than a thousand mice in all. In the past few years, Zuker and the geneticist Nicholas Ryba, at the National Institutes of Health, together with a succession of graduate and postdoctoral students, have used these animals to help identify the taste receptors. They began, in 1998, by scanning RNA sequences from the tongue and homing in on the most likely genes. They then bred mice that lacked the genes, to see how their tastes were affected. Within two years, Zuker's team had located the entire family of twenty-six bitter receptors. By 2001, they'd found the receptors for sweet and umami as well. Zuker's team wasn't alone in making some of these discoveries—biologists at Harvard, the Monell Chemical Senses Center, in Philadelphia, and other labs also found receptors—but his mice provided the decisive evidence. It was an astonishing feat of genetic sleuthing. "I was stupefied," Claude Nofre told me. "I thought they would be found in the year 3000." To celebrate, the journal *Cell* put a chocolate cake on its cover, flanked by two mice.

The taste cells that Zuker found were much simpler than biologists had imagined. Instead of bristling with every kind of receptor, each cell was tuned to a single frequency: some



"And that's my tomb."



cells detected sweet, others bitter, still others umami. (The receptors for salty and sour have yet to be found.) There seemed to be no elaborate signals to encode and decode, no danger that the brain might misread that little part about arsenic in a lengthy molecular report about mangoes and bananas. The tongue, like any good electrical system, was wired with well-insulated, well-labelled lines. All the brain had to do was follow instructions.

To demonstrate, Zuker led me to a small, tiled room with two cages full of mice. One set had white fur, red eyes, and untampered genes; the others were brown-haired, black-eyed mutants. The mice had not had water for a while, so they were extremely thirsty. We were going to offer them three bottles filled with different liquids, Zuker said, and he invited me to take a taste. The first was just water, the second was sugar water, and the third—"Don't slurp it!" Zuker said—was the most unpleasant thing I'd ever had. The water had been dosed with the world's bitterest known substance, denatonium benzoate, a "freak molecule" that's often put into pesticides and household cleaners to prevent accidental poisonings. After a minute or so, it showed no signs of releasing its fierce grip on my tongue. I popped a Warhead in my mouth to try to blast it off. This was a mistake. The denatonium combined with the acids in the candy to trigger something like a mushroom cloud inside my head. "Let that teach you a lesson about the biology of taste," Zuker said.

The white mice didn't like the denatonium, either. When Zuker gave them the two other liquids, they lapped them up so quickly that their tongues were a blur, but they could stand only a lick or two of denatonium before running to the other side of the cage. The mutants, though, had had their bitter receptors knocked out genetically, so the denatonium was tasteless to them. Zuker's team had also engineered mutants that reacted to bitter as if it were sweet. They'd even taken a mouse's sweet taste cells and inserted a receptor for a tasteless, artificial compound that the mouse then guzzled as if it were sugar water. "The animal kingdom sees the world as a binary choice," Zuker concluded. "Something is sweet not because it tastes sweet but because it activates cells in your brain that say, 'This is good.'" Bitter foods activate cells that signal, "This is bad." "It is an absolutely gorgeous example of Darwinian evolution," Zuker said. "Otherwise, you eat it and you die."

Zuker's theory strikes some researchers as simplistic; isolated taste cells seem to respond to a number of tastes, not just those from a single receptor. But few doubt the practical value of the receptors he has found. Pharmaceutical firms have long used certain receptors to search for new compounds and to create targeted drugs with fewer side effects. The same technology can now be used to search for new sweeteners. Zuker has little interest in doing this work. "I am a pure basic scientist," he told me. "I'm trying to figure out how the brain works, not how to make chemicals taste better." But he isn't averse to letting others do it for him. In 1998, Zuker and a small group of other scientists and businessmen founded Senomyx, a biotech firm devoted to taste. Senomyx now has a patent on the use of the sweet receptor, patents pending on the umami and bitter receptors, and partnerships with Kraft, Coca-Cola, Nestlé, Campbell's, and Cadbury-Schweppes. In the next few years, Senomyx and its partners hope to reinvent the flavors in our food without anyone really noticing.

The Senomyx laboratories are about a ten-minute drive from Zuker's lab, in a low-slung stucco building in Torrey Pines. Inside, about seventy-five scientists pursue what is known as "high-throughput screening": a modern, hyper-accelerated version of Nofre and Tinti's taste tests. They start by creating what they call artificial taste buds: human cells, with a single taste receptor, engineered with a fluorescent dye that lights up only when the receptor is triggered. The cells are placed in clear plastic trays divided into three hundred and eighty-four wells, each a couple of millimetres wide. A robotic arm with three hundred and eighty-four nozzles squirts a different compound into every well. Whenever a cell lights up—about a one-in-a-thousand occurrence—it is registered by a fluorometric sensor and tallied by a computer. In Nofre and Tinti's days, testing this many samples would have taken months. At Senomyx, it takes less than five minutes.

"When you think about how many

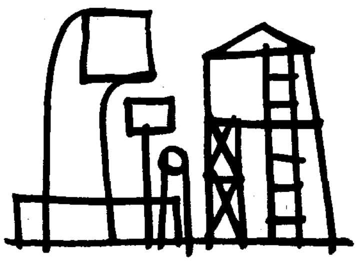
things have been tasted, it's not that many," Mark Zoller, the company's head of research, told me. "Usually what people do is create derivatives of what they already know: if you have aspartame, you create neotame. We can go in completely from left field, with no preconceptions about what can be sweet. We have a library of two hundred and fifty thousand compounds, and we are creating new libraries all the time. We can throw it all at the receptor and let the results speak for themselves." In the past four years, Senomyx has tested more than twenty million samples. Its sweetener program has identified the three most promising classes of chemicals, whittled those down to two candidates, and tinkered with them in the lab, adding some atoms for stability, some for potency. The final product won't be a new sugar substitute—"How many of those do we need?" Zuker says. It may not even have any taste. All it will do is amplify the taste of sugar.

Taste potentiators, as they're called, are not entirely new to the food industry. The ingredient list on a can of soup or a hunk of processed cheese sometimes includes a substance called IMP, a few entries below MSG, or monosodium glutamate. MSG is to umami what sugar is to sweet: the taste in its purest, most familiar form. IMP's singular virtue is its synergy with MSG. Like the sweet receptor, the umami receptor has multiple binding sites. IMP attaches to one spot, MSG to another; together, they fit so snugly that their effect is multiplied. Add a little IMP to a soup with MSG in it, and the umami taste will increase roughly ten-fold. "It's like a hearing aid," Zoller told me. It turns up the volume.

Senomyx has found four new umami potentiators in the course of its chemical trawling, all of them more effective than IMP, all recently declared safe by the F.D.A. (The first products containing them should appear later this year.) The company's two sweet potentiators aren't quite as far along. The best one is known as Substance 951. If you add only a few parts per million of it to a soda, you can take out forty per cent of the sugar and the soda will taste as sweet. But Senomyx is still working on making it stronger and on improving or eliminating its taste. (I wasn't allowed to try it.) Zoller says that the compound should be on the market by next year, but most consumers won't be aware of it. Like the new umami potentiators, Substance 951 will be used in such tiny quantities that it won't have to be listed on labels. Instead, it will join all the other "natural and artificial flavors" that float through our foods, ignored by all but the most obsessive ingredient-watchers, and quietly do the work that sugar once did.

Walking through the labs at Senomyx, watching taste cells turn on and off in their little plastic wells, I was reminded of a wooden display case that I'd seen at NutraSweet. The case was fitted with three glass vials, all with different sweeteners measured in portions of equal strength. The first vial held forty grams of sugar and was nearly full. The second had a thin layer of aspartame—about a fifth of a gram. The last was labelled "neotame" and looked empty. I had to hold it up to the light to see the faint glimmer of powder inside. You could call this progress. The sweeter the chemical, the fewer of its molecules will wind up in our bloodstreams. And, if that chemical can also help curb obesity and diabetes, so much the better. "We consume too many calories and we don't have to," Craig Petray told me. "If products can taste the same and have twenty-five or thirty per cent less sugar, that's a start."

The same argument, of course, has always been made for artificial sweeteners. Like the dream of the paperless office or the superhighway that will untangle traffic for good, it presumes that there is a natural limit to our needs—that humanity's sweet tooth can be satisfied. Yet our sweet receptors evolved in environments with so little sugar that they may not have a shutoff point. Elizabeth Cashdan, an anthropologist at the University of Utah, has seen African bushmen pick fruit apart for the barest trace of pulp. "And honey! What they will go through for a taste of honey is just incredible," she says.



A number of biologists have tried to gauge the depth of our appetite for sugar over the years. Newborns, they've found, are already fixated on sweetness. If you put some sugar on a latex nipple, an infant will suck it longer and harder than a plain nipple. Give her a drop of sweet water when she's crying and her heartbeat will slow, her face will relax, and her brain activity will fall into a "hedonically positive" pattern. (Hugs and pacifiers have a similar effect, but not as lasting.) According to the biologist Julie Mennella, at the Monell Chemical Senses Center, sugar seems to trigger the release of opiates in the brain, both bringing pleasure and blocking pain. (When Mennella asked children to stick their hands in icy water, those with some sugar water in their mouths kept their hands in longer.) Adults who are offered drinks of different sugar concentrations tend to reach a "bliss point" at about nine teaspoons per cup—fifty per cent sweeter than the average soft drink. Children prefer eleven teaspoons per cup, and they'll take it even stronger. "For babies, the fundamental rule is: the sweeter the better," Monell's director, Gary Beauchamp, told me. "There is nothing that is too sweet."

Beauchamp has also tried to study the opposite tendency: the less sugar people eat, the less of a taste for it they have. He had to abandon the experiment, though, because his subjects couldn't stick to their sugar-free diets. (They were much better at abstaining from salt; and he did find that their appetite for it diminished.) The human palate is nothing if not adaptable, but it's hard to lose your craving for sugar when it's found in everything from wheat bread to spaghetti sauce to macaroni and cheese. Artificial sweeteners, far from diminishing that appetite, often seem to reinforce it. Americans ate about twenty-four pounds of sugar substitutes per person last year, nearly double what they did in 1980, yet sugar consumption rose about twenty-five per cent in the same period. The trend is strongest among blacks and Hispanics—they like their food with about ten per cent more sugar than whites do, studies by Susan Schiffman, a medical psychologist at Duke, have shown—and weakest among Asians. As Schiffman puts it, our taste for sweeteners is being "upregulated."

The closest analogy may be what has happened to our sense of pitch. In 1740, when Handel rang his tuning fork, an A above middle C had a frequency of four hundred and twenty-two hertz. Throughout the nineteenth century, orchestras were tuning it higher, straining to fill larger and larger halls and make their sound just a little more brilliant. These days, when Lorin Maazel rings his tuning fork, that same A gives a steady pitch of four hundred and forty hertz, but some conductors in Germany and Austria have gone up another five hertz. In music, if you go too high, strings snap and voices crack. In the matter of sweets, the only real limit is exhaustion: when Zuker offers sugar water to his mice, they keep on drinking until their tongues can hardly move.

One afternoon, Zuker drove me to an Asian strip mall a few miles from the university. A Chinese graduate student had recommended a place there called Spicy City. The restaurant had a bright-red carpet, devil masks and chili peppers on the walls, and a menu of daunting authenticity. Zuker glanced over the choices with a kind of sadomasochistic glee. " 'Hot spicy pork blood with black sea cucumber, squid, and golden mushroom,' " he said. "Is it kosher?" He finally settled on a dish called Husband and Wife, made of cold sliced beef and tripe drenched in chili oil. He liked to experience "very distinct, acute sensory events," he explained. "The best is to eat something spicy, naked."

Nothing in the biology of taste could really explain the appeal of Spicy City. Our tongues are wired for yes and no, good and bad, not for "It tastes like it's rotting but I can't stop eating it" or "It's incinerating my flesh and I find this oddly pleasurable." Any mouse knows to shun bitter and spicy foods as poisonous, but Zuker is no mouse. Like all of us, he is part rationalist and part sensualist—though perhaps he pushes both sides to an extreme. He has taken driving lessons at a racecar track, keeps a cellar full of Chilean wines, and built a swimming pool on the cliffs beside his house with a vanishing edge that seems to tumble into the void. The best part of being human, he knows, is ignoring what your body tells you from time to time.

The rise of sugar since Columbus sometimes seems destined to turn us all into lab animals, dutifully gorging on sweets. But Columbus did more than bring sugarcane to the New World. He also brought a few things home. Cocoa was popular long before it was sweetened, and chilies are now eaten by a quarter of the world's adults every day. You can explain this in pharmacological terms (cocoa contains caffeine), in hygienic terms (chilies kill bacteria), or as a function of peer pressure. But the best explanation may be what the psychologist Paul Rozin, at the University of Pennsylvania, calls "benign masochism." We eat chilies, Warheads, and bitter greens, and drink bitter tonics and bitter coffee, for the same reason that we ride roller coasters and watch horror films: to fool the body into thinking it's in danger, and then enjoy the adrenal ride. Our taste buds may tell us that nothing is as good as sugar, but our minds can be taught to know better.

"We like to experience the edge, to push our sensory systems to the limit," Zuker told me later, in his car. "Whether it's tasting things or driving very fast cars, we like to enjoy things we should not enjoy." He took a winding road down the coast, past a cluster of surfers in wetsuits paddling into the Pacific, and a pair of hang gliders getting ready to throw themselves from the cliffs of La Jolla. When the road peeled away from the shore, he shifted into third gear and accelerated to a hundred and fifteen, hurtling past a red truck that nearly turned into our lane. He glanced at me, backed deep into my seat with my hands clutching the armrests, and laughed. "You're a pussy!" he shouted. Then he jammed the stick shift forward and threw the car into the next turn. ♦

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NAZIS SAY THE DARNEDEST THINGS

BY ANDY BOROWITZ

> The discovery of the so-called Hitler Book marks the end of a remarkable hunt through Soviet archives. . . . Perhaps the most disconcerting revelation . . . is that Hitler had a sense of humour, albeit a particularly cold one. —*The Times of London.*

One night in Berlin, Hitler, Göring, and Goebbels walked into a bar. Noticing that the bartender's hands were shaking, Hitler asked him what was wrong. "We don't get too many high-ranking officials of the Third Reich in here," he said.

"Well, at these prices, I'm not surprised," said Hitler, pulling out a Luger and shooting him.

Speaking before an audience of thousands at the Nuremberg Rally of 1936, Hitler departed from his prepared text to share one of his favorite jokes. "A patient complaining of a sore throat goes to see a doctor," Hitler began. "After examining him, the doctor says, 'Your tonsils have to come out.' The patient says, 'I want a second opinion.' So the doctor says, 'O.K.—you're also of an inferior race.' "

On December 7, 1941, Hitler opened a meeting of the Nazi high command as he often did: with a knock-knock joke.

"Knock-knock," he said.

"Who's there?" said Goebbels.

"Tojo," he said.

"Tojo who?"

"Tojo the Japanese would bomb Pearl Harbor," Hitler said, roaring with laughter.

After the successful publication of "Mein Kampf," Hitler immediately started writing a sequel. The new book, "Adolf Hitler's 1001 Favorite Insults," instantly became the No. 1 best-seller in Germany and was an invaluable reference work for Nazi after-dinner speakers. A quick perusal of the book reveals that not only was Hitler a Fascist madman bent on world domination; he was also the originator of the "yo mama" joke, as these examples show:

"Yo mama so fat, the Luftwaffe mistook her for London."

"Yo mama so lazy, she stopped after she invaded Belgium."

"Yo mama so dirty, she hasn't taken a bath since the First Reich."

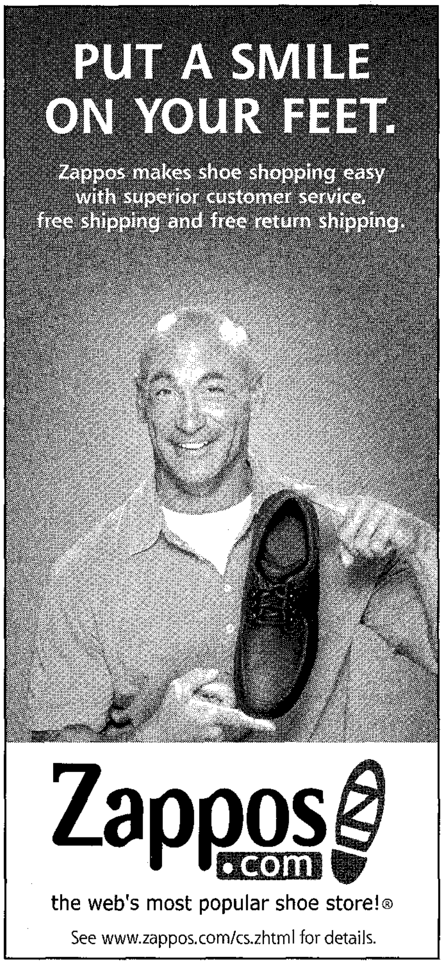
Even in his dealings with other heads of state, Hitler's unique sense of humor never failed him. After signing the Munich Agreement, in 1938, Hitler broke the treaty less than a year later by invading Prague. Incensed, the British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, telephoned Hitler and demanded to know why German troops had crossed the agreed-upon border. Without missing a beat, Hitler replied, "To get to the other side."

In 1940, Charlie Chaplin satirized Hitler in his film "The Great Dictator." Infuriated, Hitler vowed to star in a comedy of his own in which he would make merciless fun of Chaplin. He hired Leni Riefenstahl to direct the film, which had the working title "The Little Bastard." In his first script meeting with Riefenstahl, Hitler described the following comic bit: "I'll be dressed in a tramp costume, just like Chaplin, and we'll do the scene in 'The Gold Rush' where he cooks his shoe and eats it." Riefenstahl looked confused. "What's the twist?" she asked. Barely containing his giggles, Hitler said, "This time, he'll choke on the shoelaces and die."

Even in his final days in his bunker, Hitler entertained his Nazi colleagues with a near-constant stream of jokes, many of the gallows variety. In one that he was particularly fond of telling, Hitler and his lawyer appear before St. Peter at the gates of Heaven. After St. Peter reads a long list of charges against Hitler, the Führer's lawyer launches into an impassioned defense. Finally, the lawyer rests his case and St. Peter speaks up: "Hitler can come in, but you have to go to Hell."

"Hell?" the lawyer asks. "What did I do?"

"You went to law school," St. Peter says. ♦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In the case of Sugar v. Forman, Cesar Millan knew none of the facts before arriving at the scene of the crime. That is the way Cesar prefers it. His job was to reconcile Forman with Sugar, and, since Sugar was a good deal less adept in making her case than Forman, whatever he learned beforehand might bias him in favor of the aggrieved party.

The Forman residence was in a trailer park in Mission Hills, just north of Los Angeles. Dark wood panelling, leather couches, deep-pile carpeting. The air-conditioning was on, even though it was one of those ridiculously pristine Southern California days. Lynda Forman was in her sixties, possibly older, a handsome woman with a winning sense of humor. Her husband, Ray, was in a wheelchair, and looked vaguely ex-military. Cesar sat across from them, in black jeans and a blue shirt, his posture characteristically perfect.

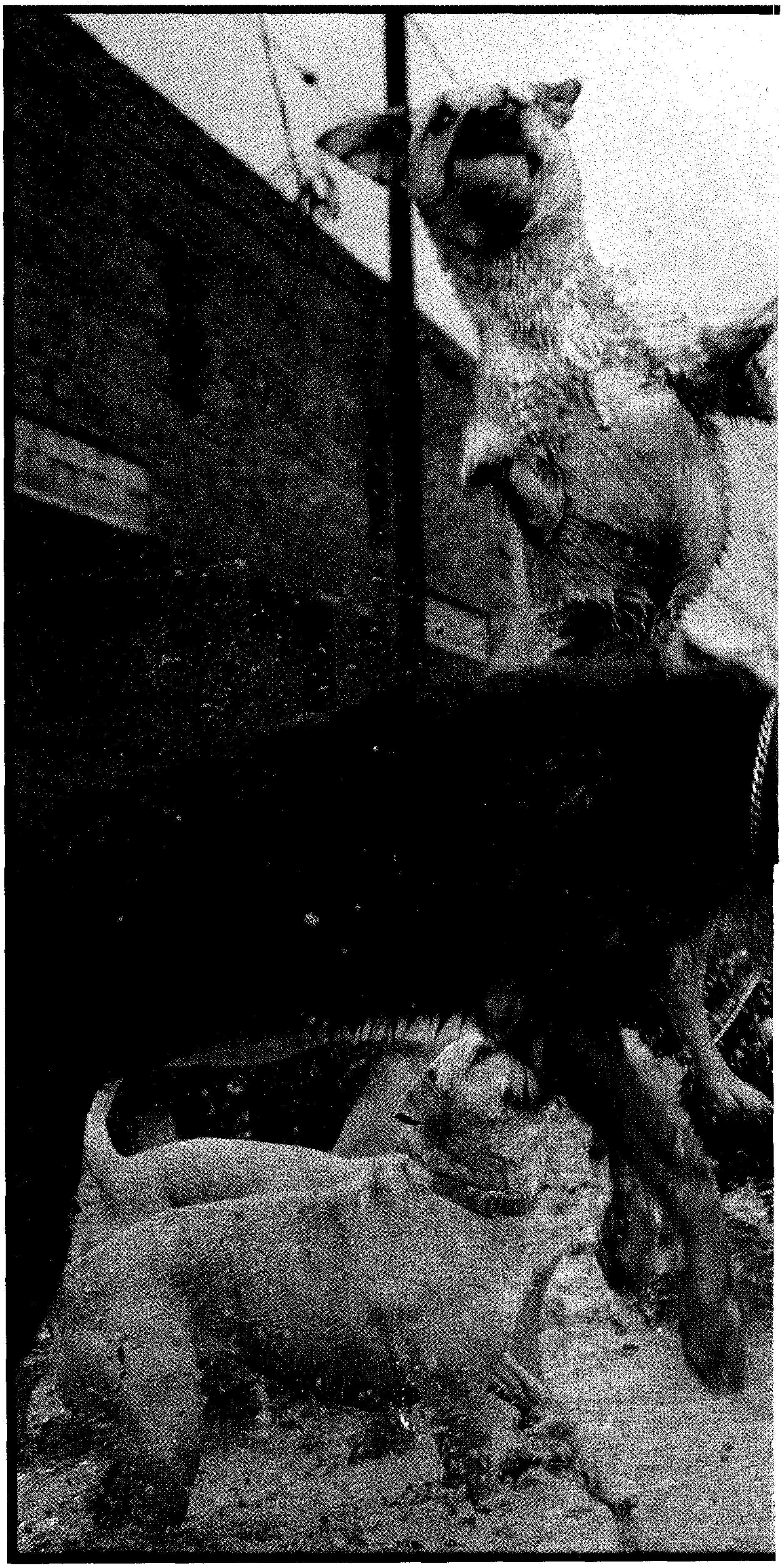
"So how can I help?" he said.

"You can help our monster turn into a sweet, lovable dog," Lynda replied. It was clear that she had been thinking about how to describe Sugar to Cesar for a long time. "She's ninety per cent bad, ten per cent the love. . . . She sleeps with us at night. She cuddles." Sugar meant a lot to Lynda. "But she grabs anything in sight that she can get, and tries to destroy it. My husband is disabled, and she destroys his room. She tears clothes. She's torn our carpet. She bothers my grandchildren. If I open the door, she will run." Lynda pushed back her sleeves and exposed her forearms. They were covered in so many bites and scratches and scars and scabs that it was as if she had been tortured. "But I love her. What can I say?"

Cesar looked at her arms and blinked: "Wow."

Cesar is not a tall man. He is built like a soccer player. He is in his mid-thirties, and has large, wide eyes, olive skin, and white teeth. He crawled across the border from Mexico fourteen years ago, but his English is exceptional, except when he gets excited and starts dropping his articles—which almost never happens, because he rarely gets excited. He saw the arms and he said, "Wow," but it was a "wow" in the same calm tone of voice as "So how can I help?"

Cesar began to ask questions. Did Sugar urinate in the house? She did.



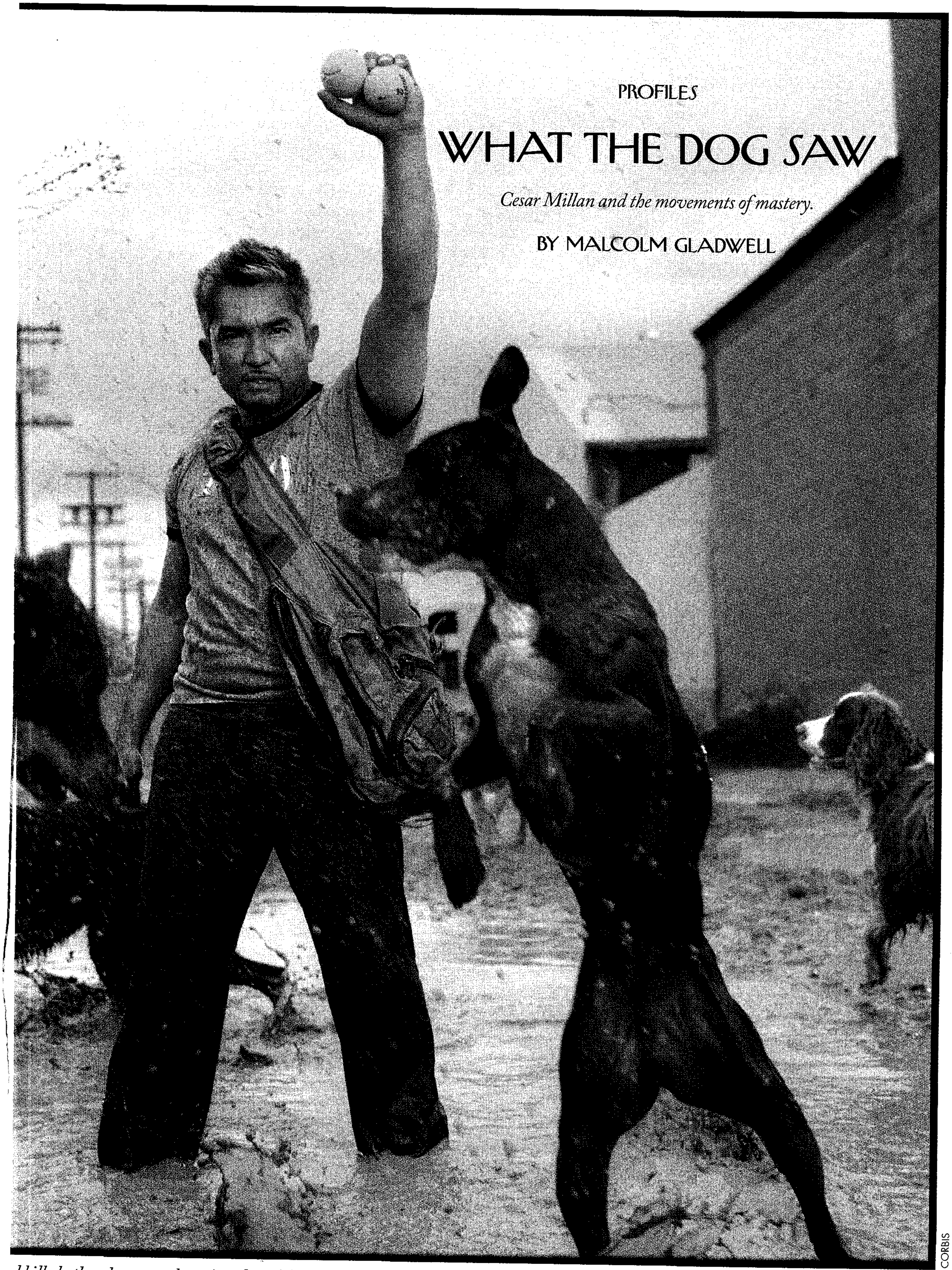
Cesar has made his reputation by taking on the toughest dogs—dogs that have injured peo

PROFILES

WHAT THE DOG SAW

Cesar Millan and the movements of mastery.

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL



CORBIS

d killed other dogs—and taming them. They see something in him that they don't see in their owners. Photomontage by Martin Schoeller.

"Why, Mr. Larsen! We were about ready to give up on you."

• •

She had a particularly destructive relationship with newspapers, television remotes, and plastic cups. Cesar asked about walks. Did Sugar travel, or did she track—and when he said "track" he did an astonishing impersonation of a dog sniffing. Sugar tracked. What about discipline?

"Sometimes I put her in a crate," Lynda said. "And it's only for a fifteen-minute period. Then she lays down and she's fine. I don't know how to give discipline. Ask my kids."

"Did your parents discipline you?"

"I didn't need discipline. I was perfect."

"So you had no rules. . . . What about using physical touch with Sugar?"

"I have used it. It bothers me."

"What about the bites?"

"I can see it in the head. She gives me that look."

"She's reminding you who rules the roost."

"Then she will lick me for half an hour where she has bit me."

"She's not apologizing. Dogs lick each others' wounds to heal the pack, you know."

Lynda looked a little lost. "I thought she was saying sorry."

"If she was sorry," Cesar said, softly, "she wouldn't do it in the first place."

It was time for the defendant. Lynda's granddaughter, Carly, came in, holding a beagle as if it were a baby. Sugar was cute, but she had a mean, feral look in her eyes. Carly put Sugar on the carpet, and Sugar swaggered over to Cesar, sniffing his shoes. In front of her, Cesar placed a newspaper, a plastic cup, and a television remote.

Sugar grabbed the newspaper. Cesar snatched it back. Sugar picked up the newspaper again. She jumped on the couch. Cesar took his hand and "bit" Sugar on the shoulder, firmly and calmly. "My hand is the mouth," he explained. "My fingers are the teeth." Sugar jumped down. Cesar stood, and firmly and fluidly held Sugar down for an instant. Sugar struggled, briefly, then relaxed. Cesar backed off. Sugar lunged at the remote. Cesar looked at her and said, simply and briefly, "Sh-h-h." Sugar hesitated. She went for the plastic cup. Cesar said, "Sh-h-h." She dropped it. Cesar motioned for Lynda to bring a jar of treats into the room. He placed it in the middle of the floor and hovered over it. Sugar looked at the treats and then at Cesar. She began sniffing, inching closer, but an invisible boundary now stood between her and the prize. She circled and circled but never came closer than three feet. She looked as if she were about to jump on the couch. Cesar shifted his weight, and blocked her. He took a step toward her. She backed up, head lowered, into the furthest corner of the room. She sank down on her haunches, then placed her head flat on the ground. Cesar took the treats, the remote, the plastic cup, and the newspaper and placed them inches from her lowered nose. Sugar, the one-time terror of Mission Hills, closed her eyes in surrender.

"She has no rules in the outside world, no boundaries," Cesar said, finally. "You practice exercise and affection. But you're not practicing exercise, discipline, and affection. When we love someone, we fulfill everything about them. That's loving. And you're not loving your dog." He stood up. He looked around. "Let's go for a walk."

Lynda staggered into the kitchen. In five minutes, her monster had turned into an angel.

"Unbelievable," she said.

Cesar Millan runs the Dog Psychology Center out of a converted auto mechanic's shop in the industrial zone of South-Central Los Angeles. The center is situated at the end of a long narrow alley, off a busy street lined with bleak warehouses and garages. Behind a high green chain-link fence is a large concrete yard, and everywhere around the yard there are dogs. Dogs basking in the sun. Dogs splashing in a pool. Dogs lying on picnic tables. Cesar takes in people's problem dogs; he keeps them for a minimum of two weeks, integrating them into the pack. He has no formal training. He learned what he knows growing up in Mexico on his grandfather's farm in Sinaloa. As a child, he was called *el Perrero*, "the dog boy," watching and studying until he felt that he could put himself inside the mind of a dog. In the mornings, Cesar takes the pack on a four-hour walk in the Santa Monica mountains: Cesar in front, the dogs behind him; the pit bulls and the Rottweilers and the German shepherds with backpacks, so that when the little dogs get tired Cesar can load them up on the big dogs' backs. Then they come back and eat. Exercise, then food. Work, then reward.

"I have forty-seven dogs right now," Cesar said. He opened the door, and they came running over, a jumble of dogs, big and small. Cesar pointed to a bloodhound. "He was aggressive with humans, really aggressive," he said. In a corner of the compound, a Wheaton terrier had just been given a bath. "She's stayed here six months because she could not trust men," Cesar explained. "She was beat up severely." He idly scratched a big German shepherd. "My girlfriend here, Beauty. If you were to see the relationship between her and her owner." He shook his head. "A very sick relationship. A 'Fatal Attraction' kind of thing. Beauty sees her and she starts scratching her and biting her, and the owner is, like, 'I love you, too.' That one killed a dog. That one killed a dog, too. Those two guys came from New Orleans. They attacked humans. That pit bull over there with a tennis ball killed a Labrador in Beverly Hills. And look at this one—one eye. Lost the eye in a dogfight. But look at him now." Now he was nuzzling a French bulldog. He was happy—and so was the Labrador killer from Beverly Hills, who was stretched out in the sun, and so was the aggressive-toward-humans bloodhound, who was lingering by a picnic table with his tongue hanging out. Cesar stood in the midst of all the dogs, his back straight and his shoulders square. It was a prison yard. But it was the most peaceful prison yard in all of California. "The whole point is that everybody has to stay calm, submissive, no matter what," he said. "What you are witnessing right now is a group of dogs who all have the same state of mind."

Cesar Millan is the host of "Dog Whisperer," on the National Geographic television channel. In every episode, he arrives amid canine chaos and leaves behind peace. He is the teacher we all had in grade school who could walk into a classroom filled with rambunctious kids and get everyone to calm down and *behave*. But what did that teacher have? If you'd asked us back then, we might have said that we behaved for Mr. Exley because Mr. Exley had lots of rules and was really strict. But the truth is that we behaved for Mr. DeBock as well, and he wasn't strict at all. What we really mean is that both of them had that indefinable thing called presence—and if you are going to teach a classroom full of headstrong ten-year-olds, or run a company, or command an army, or walk into a trailer home in Mission Hills where a beagle named Sugar is terrorizing its owners, you have to have presence or you're lost.

Behind the Dog Psychology Center, between the back fence and the walls of the adjoining buildings, Cesar has built a dog run—a stretch of grass and dirt as long as a city block. "This is our Chuck E. Cheese," Cesar said. The dogs saw Cesar approaching the back gate, and they ran, expectantly, toward him, piling through the narrow door in a hodgepodge of whiskers and wagging tails. Cesar had a bag over his shoulder, filled with tennis balls, and a long orange plastic ball scoop in his right hand. He reached into the bag with the scoop, grabbed a tennis ball, and flung it in a smooth practiced motion off the wall of an adjoining warehouse. A dozen dogs set off in ragged pursuit. Cesar wheeled and threw another ball, in the opposite direction, and then a third, and then a fourth, until there were so many balls in the air and on the ground that the pack had turned into a yelping, howling, leaping, charging frenzy. Woof. Woof, woof, woof. *Woof.* "The game should be played five or ten minutes, maybe fifteen minutes," Cesar said. "You begin. You end. And you don't ask, 'Please stop.' You demand that it stop." With that, Cesar gathered himself, stood stock still, and let out a short whistle: not a casual whistle but a whistle of authority. Suddenly, there was absolute quiet. All forty-seven dogs stopped charging and jumping and stood as still as Cesar, their heads erect, eyes trained on their ringleader. Cesar nodded, almost imperceptibly, toward the enclosure, and all forty-seven dogs turned and filed happily back through the gate.

Last fall, Cesar filmed an episode of "Dog Whisperer" at the Los Angeles home of a couple named Patrice and Scott. They had a Korean jindo named JonBee, a stray that they had found and adopted. Outside, and on walks, JonBee was well behaved and affectionate. Inside the house, he was a terror, turning viciously on Scott whenever he tried to get the dog to submit.

"Help us tame the wild beast," Scott says to Cesar. "We've had two trainers come out, one of whom was doing this domination thing, where he would put JonBee on his back and would hold him until he submits. It went on for a good twenty minutes. This dog never let up. But, as soon as he let go, JonBee bit him four times. . . . The guy was bleeding, both hands and his arms. I had another trainer come out, too, and they said, 'You've got to get rid of this dog.' "

Cesar goes outside to meet JonBee. He walks down a few steps to the back yard. Cesar crouches down next to the dog. "The owner was a little concerned about me coming here by myself," he

"Eventually, I'd like to see you able to put yourself back together."

says. "To tell you the truth, I feel more comfortable with aggressive dogs than insecure dogs, or fearful dogs, or panicky dogs. These are actually the guys who put me on the map." JonBee comes up and sniffs him. Cesar puts a leash on him. JonBee eyes Cesar nervously and starts to poke around.

Cesar then walks JonBee into the living room. Scott puts a muzzle on him. Cesar tries to get the dog to lie on its side—and all hell breaks loose. JonBee turns and snaps and squirms and spins and jumps and lunges and struggles. His muzzle falls off. He bites Cesar. He twists his body up into the air, in a cold, vicious fury. The struggle between the two goes on and on. Patrice covers her face. Cesar asks her to leave the room. He is standing up, leash extended. He looks like a wrangler, taming a particularly ornery rattlesnake. Sweat is streaming down his face. Finally, Cesar gets the dog to sit, then to lie down, and then, somehow, to lie on its side. JonBee slumps, defeated. Cesar massages JonBee's stomach. "That's all we wanted," he says.

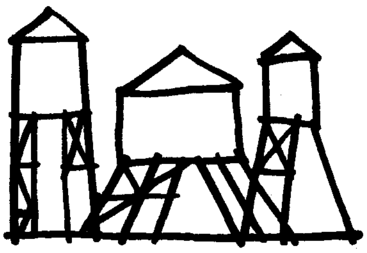
What happened between Cesar and JonBee? One explanation is that they had a fight, alpha male versus alpha male. But fights don't come out of nowhere. JonBee was clearly reacting to something in Cesar. Before he fought, he sniffed and explored and watched Cesar—the last of which is most important, because everything we know about dogs suggests that, in a way that is true of almost no other animals, dogs are students of human movement.

The anthropologist Brian Hare has done experiments with dogs, for example, where he puts a piece of food under one of two cups, placed several feet apart. The dog knows that there is food to be had, but has no idea which of the cups holds the prize. Then Hare points at the right cup, taps on it, looks directly at it. What happens? The dog goes to the right cup virtually every time. Yet when Hare did the same experiment with chimpanzees—an animal that shares 98.6 per cent of our genes—the chimps couldn't get it right. A dog will look at you for help, and a chimp won't.

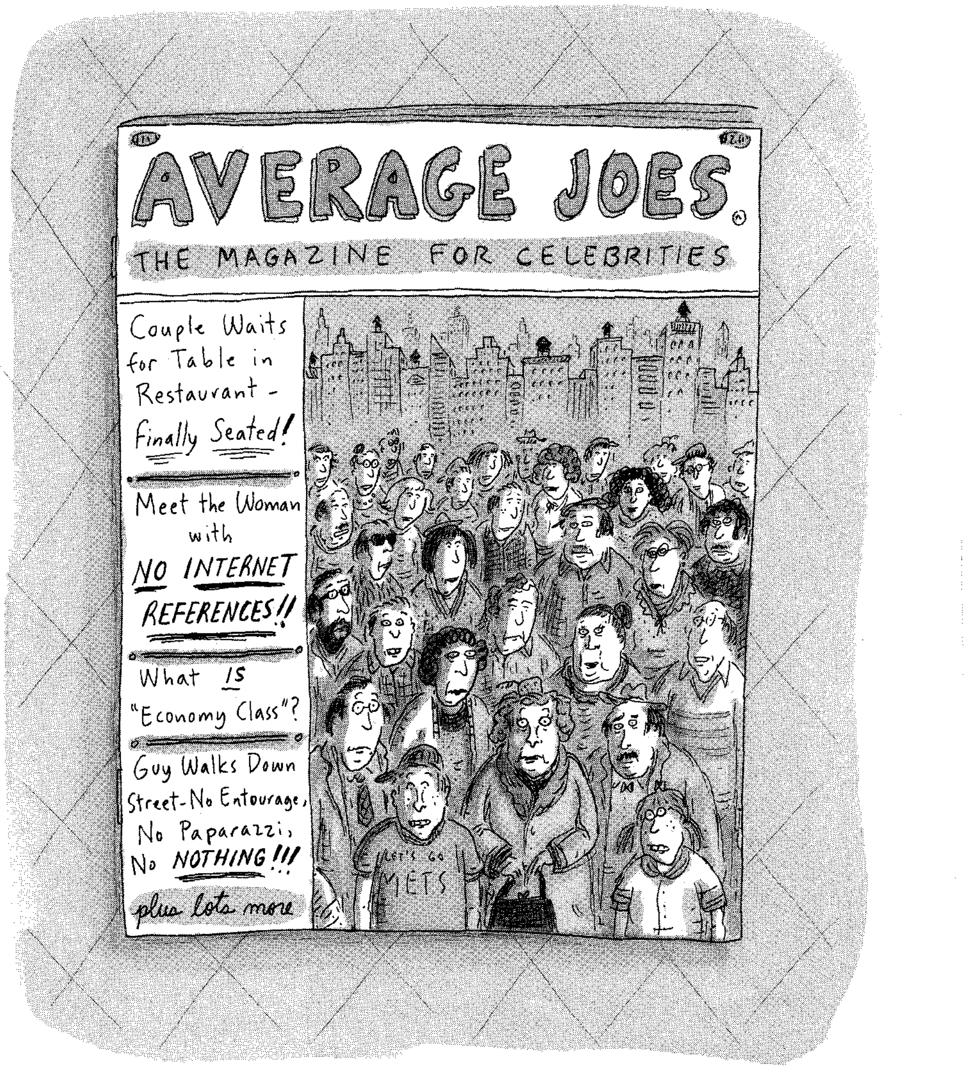
"Primates are very good at using the cues of the same species," Hare explained. "So if we were able to do a similar game, and it was a chimp or another primate giving a social cue, they might do better. But they are not good at using human cues when you are trying to coöperate with them. They don't get it: 'Why would you ever tell me where the food is?' The key specialization of dogs, though, is that dogs pay attention to humans, when humans are doing something very human, which is sharing information about something that someone else might actually want." Dogs aren't smarter than chimps; they just have a different attitude toward people. "Dogs are really interested in humans," Hare went on. "Interested to the point of obsession. To a dog, you are a giant walking tennis ball."

A dog cares, deeply, which way your body is leaning. Forward or backward? Forward can be seen as aggressive; backward—even a quarter of an inch—means nonthreatening. It means you've relinquished what ethologists call an "intention movement" to proceed forward. Cock your head, even slightly, to the side, and a dog is disarmed. Look at him straight on and he'll read it like a red flag. Standing straight, with your shoulders squared, rather than slumped, can mean the difference between whether your dog obeys a command or ignores it. Breathing even and deeply—rather than holding your breath—can mean the difference between defusing a tense situation and igniting it. "I think they are looking at our eyes and where our eyes are looking, and what our eyes look like," the ethologist Patricia McConnell, who teaches at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, says. "A rounded eye with a dilated pupil is a sign of high arousal and aggression in a dog. I believe they pay a tremendous amount of attention to how relaxed our face is and how relaxed our facial muscles are, because that's a big cue for them with each other. Is the jaw relaxed? Is the mouth slightly open? And then the arms. They pay a tremendous amount of attention to where our arms go."

In the book "The Other End of the Leash," McConnell decodes one of the most common of all human-dog interactions—the meeting between two leashed animals on a walk. To us, it's about one dog sizing up another. To her, it's about two dogs sizing up each other after first sizing up their respective owners. The owners "are often anxious about how well the dogs will get along," she writes, "and if you watch them instead of the dogs, you'll often notice that the humans will hold their breath and round their eyes and mouths in an 'on alert' expression. Since these behaviors are expressions of offensive aggression in canine culture, I suspect that the humans are unwittingly signalling tension. If you exaggerate this by tightening the leash, as many owners do, you can actually cause the dogs to attack each other. Think of it: the dogs are in a tense social encounter, surrounded by support from their own pack, with the humans forming a tense, staring, breathless circle around them. I don't know how many times I've seen dogs shift their eyes toward their owner's frozen faces, and then launch growling at the other dog."



When Cesar walked down the stairs of Patrice and Scott's home then, and crouched down in the back yard, JonBee *looked* at him, intently. And what he saw was someone who moved in a very particular way. Cesar is fluid. "He's beautifully organized intra-physically," Karen Bradley, who heads the graduate dance program at the University of Maryland, said when she first saw tapes of Cesar in action. "That lower-unit organization—I wonder whether he was a soccer player." Movement experts like Bradley use something called Laban Movement Analysis to make sense of movement, describing, for instance, how people shift their weight, or how fluid and symmetrical they are when they move, or what kind of "effort" it involves. Is it direct or indirect—that is, what kind of attention does the movement convey? Is it quick or slow? Is it strong or light—that is, what is its intention? Is it bound or free—that is, how much precision is involved? If you want to emphasize a point, you might bring your hand down across your body in a single, smooth motion. But how you make that motion greatly affects how your point will be interpreted by your audience. Ideally, your hand would come down in an explosive, bound movement—that is, with accelerating force, ending abruptly and pre-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cisely—and your head and shoulders would descend simultaneously, so posture and gesture would be in harmony. Suppose, though, that your head and shoulders moved upward as your hand came down, or your hand came down in a free, implosive manner—that is, with a kind of a vague, decelerating force. Now your movement suggests that you are making a point on which we all agree, which is the opposite of your intention. Combinations of posture and gesture are called phrasing, and the great communicators are those who match their phrasing with their communicative intentions—who understand, for instance, that emphasis requires them to be bound and explosive. To Bradley, Cesar had beautiful phrasing.

There he is talking to Patrice and Scott. He has his hands in front of him, in what Laban analysts call the sagittal plane—that is, the area directly in front of and behind the torso. He then leans forward for emphasis. But as he does he lowers his hands to waist level, and draws them toward his body, to counterbalance the intrusion of his posture. And, when he leans backward again, the hands rise up, to fill the empty space. It's not the kind of thing you'd ever notice. But, when it's pointed out, its emotional meaning is unmistakable. It is respectful and reassuring. It communicates without being intrusive. Bradley was watching Cesar with the sound off, and there was one sequence she returned to again and again, in which Cesar was talking to a family, and his right hand swung down in a graceful arc across his chest. "He's dancing," Bradley said. "Look at that. It's gorgeous. It's such a gorgeous little dance.

"The thing is, his phrases are of mixed length," she went on. "Some of them are long. Some of them are very short. Some of them are explosive phrases, loaded up in the beginning and then trailing off. Some of them are impactive—building up, and then coming to a sense of impact at the end. What they are is appropriate to the task. That's what I mean by 'versatile.' "

Movement analysts tend to like watching, say, Bill Clinton or Ronald Reagan; they had great phrasing. George W. Bush does not. During this year's State of the Union address, Bush spent the entire speech swaying metronomically, straight down through his lower torso, a movement underscored, unfortunately, by the presence of a large vertical banner behind him. "Each shift ended with this focus that channels toward a particular place in the audience," Bradley said. She mimed, perfectly, the Bush gaze—the squinty, fixated look he reserves for moments of great solemnity—and gently swayed back and forth. "It's a little primitive, a little regressed." The combination of the look, the sway, and the gaze was, to her mind, distinctly adolescent. When people say of Bush that he seems eternally boyish, this is in part what they're referring to. He *moves* like a boy, which is fine, except that, unlike such movement masters as Reagan and Clinton, he can't stop moving like a boy when the occasion demands a more grown-up response.

"Mostly what we see in the normal population is undifferentiated phrasing," Bradley said. "And then you have people who are clearly preferential in their phrases, like my husband. He's Mr. Horizontal. When he's talking in a meeting, he's back. He's open. He just goes into this, this same long thing"—she leaned back, and spread her arms out wide and slowed her speech—"and it doesn't change very much. He works with people who understand him, fortunately." She laughed. "When we meet someone like this"—she nodded at Cesar, on the television screen—"what do we do? We give them their own TV series. Seriously. We reward them. We are drawn to them, because we can trust that we can get the message. It's not going to be hidden. It contributes to a feeling of authenticity."

Back to JonBee, from the beginning—only this time with the sound off. Cesar walks down the stairs. It's not the same Cesar who whistled and brought forty-seven dogs to attention. This occa-

CELEBRATING CHILDHOOD

Even the wind wishes
to become a cart
pulled by butterflies.

I remember madness:
leaning for the first time
on the mind's pillow—
I was talking to my body.

My body was an idea
I wrote in red.

Red was the sun's most beautiful throne
and all the other colors
prayed on red rugs.

Night is another candle.

In every branch an arm,
a message carried in space,
echoed by the body of the wind.

The sun insists on dressing itself in fog
when it meets me:
am I being scolded by the light?

Oh, my past days—
they used to walk in their sleep
and I used to lean on them.

Love and dreams are two parentheses.
Between them I place my body
and discover the world.

Many times
I saw the air fly with two grass feet
and the road dance with feet made of air.

My wishes are flowers
staining my body.

I was wounded early,
and early I learned
that wounds made me.

I still follow the child
who still walks inside me.

Now he stands at a stairway made of light
searching for a corner to rest in,
and to read the face of night.

If the moon were a house,
my feet would refuse to touch its doorstep.
They are taken by dust
carrying me to the air of seasons.

I walk,
one hand in the air,
the other in dreams.

A star is also
a pebble in the fields of space.

He alone
who is joined to the horizon
can build new roads.

What shall I say to the body I abandoned
in the rubble of the house
in which I was born?
No one can narrate my childhood
except those stars that flicker above it
and leave footprints
on the evening's path.

My childhood is still
being born in the cupped palms of a light
whose name I do not know
and who names me.

Out of that river he made a mirror
and asked it about his sorrow.
He made rain out of his grief
and imitated the clouds.

Your childhood is a village.
You will never cross its boundaries
no matter how far you go.

His days are lakes,
his memories floating bodies.

You who are descending
from the mountains of the past,
how can you climb them again,
and why?

Time is a door
I cannot open.
My magic is worn,
my chants asleep.

I was born in a village,
small and secretive like a womb.
I never left it.
I love the ocean, not the shores.

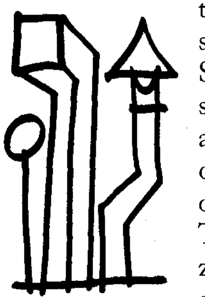
—*Adonis*

(*Translated, from the Arabic, by Khaled Mattawa.*)

sion calls for subtlety. "Did you see the way he walks? He drops his hands. They're close to his side." The analyst this time was Suzi Tortora, the author of "The Dancing Dialogue." Tortora is a New York dance-movement psychotherapist, a tall, lithe woman with long dark hair and beautiful phrasing. She was in her office on lower Broadway, a large, empty, panelled room. "He's very vertical," Tortora said. "His legs are right under his torso. He's not taking up any space. And he slows down his gait. He's telling the dog, 'I'm here by myself. I'm not going to rush. I haven't introduced myself yet. Here I am. You can feel me.' " Cesar crouches down next to JonBee. His body is perfectly symmetrical, the center of gravity low. He looks stable, as though you couldn't knock him over, which conveys a sense of calm.

JonBee was investigating Cesar, squirming nervously. When JonBee got too jumpy, Cesar would correct him, with a tug on the leash. Because Cesar was talking and the correction was so subtle, it was easy to miss. Stop. Rewind. Play. "Do you see how rhythmic it is?" Tortora said. "He pulls. He waits. He pulls. He waits. He pulls. He waits. The phrasing is so lovely. It's predictable. To a dog that is all over the place, he's bringing a rhythm. But it isn't a panicked rhythm. It has a moderate tempo to it. There was room to wander. And it's not attack, attack. It wasn't long and sustained. It was quick and light. I would bet that with dogs like this, where people are so afraid of them being aggressive and so defensive around them, that there is a lot of aggressive strength directed at them. There is no aggression here. He's using strength without it being aggressive."

Cesar moves into the living room. The fight begins. "Look how he involves the dog," Tortora said. "He's letting the dog lead. He's giving the dog room." This was not a Secret Service agent wrestling an assailant to the ground. Cesar had his body vertical, and his hand high above JonBee holding the leash, and, as JonBee turned and snapped and squirmed and spun and jumped and lunged and struggled, Cesar seemed to be moving along with him, providing a loose structure for his aggression. It may have looked like a fight, but Cesar wasn't fighting. And what was JonBee doing? Child psychologists talk about the idea of regulation. If you expose healthy babies, repeatedly, to a very loud noise, eventually they will be able to fall asleep. They'll become habituated to the noise: the first time the noise is disruptive, but, by the second or third time, they've learned to handle the disruption, and block it out. They've regulated themselves. Children throwing tantrums are said to be in a state of dysregulation. They've been knocked off-kilter in some way, and cannot bring themselves back to baseline. JonBee was dysregulated. He wasn't fighting; he was throwing a tantrum. And Cesar was the understanding parent. When JonBee paused, to catch his breath, Cesar paused with him. When JonBee bit Cesar, Cesar brought his finger to his mouth, instinctively, but in a smooth and fluid and calm motion that betrayed no anxiety. "Timing is a big part of Cesar's repertoire," Tortora went on. "His movements right now aren't complex. There aren't a lot of efforts together at one time. His range of movement qualities is limited. Look at how he's narrowing. Now he's enclosing." As JonBee calmed down, Cesar began caressing him. His touch was firm but not aggressive; not so strong as to be abusive and not so light as to be insubstantial and irritating. Using the language of movement—the plainest and most transparent of all languages—Cesar was telling JonBee that he was safe. Now JonBee was lying on his side, mouth relaxed, tongue out. "Look at that, look at the dog's face," Tortora said. This was not defeat; this was relief.

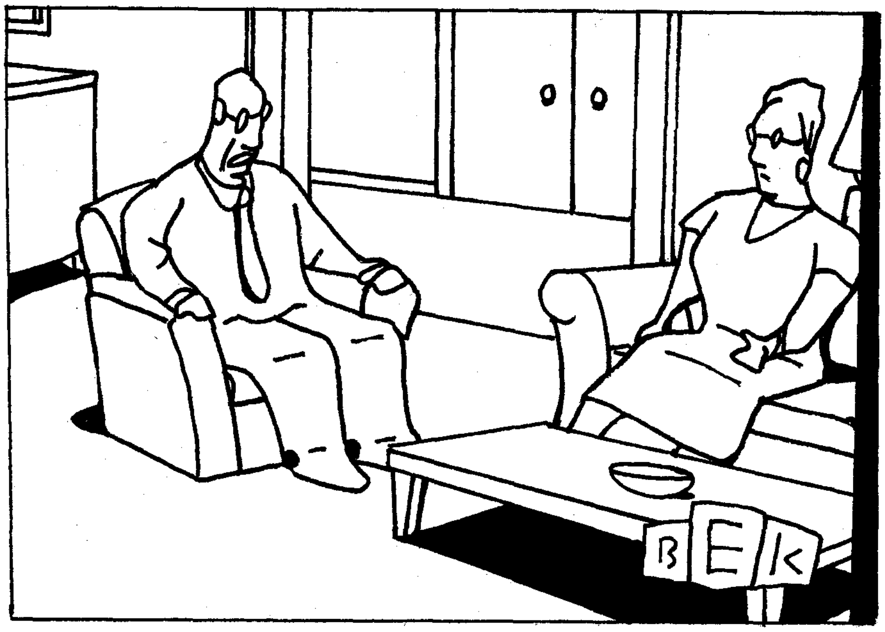


Later, when Cesar tried to show Scott how to placate JonBee, Scott couldn't do it, and Cesar made him stop. "You're still nervous," Cesar told him. "You are still unsure. That's how you become a target." It isn't as easy as it sounds to calm a dog. "There, there" in a soothing voice, accompanied by a nice belly scratch, wasn't enough for JonBee, because he was reading gesture and posture and symmetry and the precise meaning of touch. He was looking for clarity and consistency. Scott didn't have it. "Look at the tension and aggression in his face," Tortora said, when the camera turned to Scott. It was true. Scott had a long and craggy face, with high, wide cheekbones and pronounced lips, and his movements were taut and twitchy. "There's a bombardment of actions, quickness combined with tension, a quality in how he is using his eyes and focus—a darting," Tortora said. "He gesticulates in a way that is complex. There is a lot going on. So many different qualities of movement happening at the same time. It leads those who watch him to get distracted." Scott is a character actor, with a list of credits going back thirty years. The tension and aggression in his manner made him interesting and complicated—which works for Hollywood but doesn't work for a troubled dog. Scott said he loved JonBee, but the quality of his movement did not match his emotions.

For a number of years, Tortora has worked with Eric (not his real name), an autistic boy with severe language and communication problems. Tortora videotaped some of their sessions, and in one, four months after they started to work together, Eric is standing in the middle of Tortora's studio in Cold Spring, New York, a beautiful dark-haired three-and-a-half-year-old, wearing only a diaper. His mother is sitting to the side, against the wall. In the background, you can hear the soundtrack to "Riverdance," which happens to be Eric's favorite album. Eric is having a tantrum.

He gets up and runs toward the stereo. Then he runs back and throws himself down on his stomach, arms and legs flailing. Tortora throws herself down on the ground, just as he did. He sits up. She sits up. He twists. She twists. He squirms. She squirms. "When Eric is running around, I didn't say, 'Let's put on quiet music.' I can't turn him off, because he can't turn off," Tortora said. "He can't go from zero to sixty and then back down to zero. With a typical child, you might say, 'Take a deep breath. Reason with me'—and that might work. But not with children like this. They are in their world by themselves. I have to go in there and meet them and bring them back out."

Tortora sits up on her knees, and faces Eric. His legs are moving in every direction, and she takes his feet into her hands. Slowly, and subtly, she begins to move his



"Being wretched keeps me grounded."

legs in time with the music. Eric gets up and runs to the corner of the room and back again. Tortora gets up and mirrors his action, but this time she moves more fluidly and gracefully than he did. She takes his feet again. This time, she moves Eric's entire torso, opening the pelvis in a contra-lateral twist. "I'm standing above him, looking directly at him. I am very symmetrical. So I'm saying to him, I'm stable. I'm here. I'm calm. I'm holding him at the knees and giving him sensory input. It's firm and clear. Touch is an incredible tool. It's another way to speak."

She starts to rock his knees from side to side. Eric begins to calm down. He begins to make slight adjustments to the music. His legs move more freely, more lyrically. His movement is starting to get organized. He goes back into his mother's arms. He's still upset, but his cry has softened. Tortora sits and faces him—stable, symmetrical, direct eye contact.

His mother says, "You need a tissue?"

Eric nods.

Tortora brings him a tissue. Eric's mother says that she needs a tissue. Eric gives his tissue to his mother.

"Can we dance?" Tortora asks him.

"O.K.," he says, in a small voice.

It was impossible to see Tortora with Eric and not think of Cesar with JonBee: here was the same extraordinary energy and intelligence and personal force marshalled on behalf of the helpless, the same calm in the face of chaos, and, perhaps most surprising, the same gentleness. When we talk about people with presence, we often assume that they have a strong personality—that they sweep us all up in their own personal whirlwind. Our model is the Pied Piper, who played his irresistible tune and every child in Hamelin blindly followed. But Cesar Millan and Suzi Tortora play different tunes, in different situations. And they don't turn their back, and expect others to follow. Cesar let JonBee lead; Tortora's approaches to Eric were dictated by Eric. Presence is not just versatile; it's also reactive. Certain people, we say, "command our attention," but the verb is all wrong. There is no commanding, only soliciting. The dogs in the dog run wanted someone to tell them when to start and stop; they were refugees from anarchy and disorder. Eric wanted to enjoy "Riverdance." It was his favorite music. Tortora did not say, "Let us dance." She asked, "Can we dance?"

Then Tortora gets a drum, and starts to play. Eric's mother stands up and starts to circle the room, in an Irish step dance. Eric is lying on the ground, and slowly his feet start to tap in time with the music. He gets up. He walks to the corner of the room, disappears behind a partition, and then reënters, triumphant. He begins to dance, playing an imaginary flute as he circles the room.

When Cesar was twenty-one, he travelled from his home town to Tijuana, and a "coyote" took him across the border, for a hundred dollars. They waited in a hole, up to their chests in water, and then ran over the mudflats, through a junk yard, and across a freeway. A taxi took him to San Diego. After a month on the streets, grimy and dirty, he walked into a dog-grooming salon and got a job, working with the difficult cases and sleeping in the offices at night. He moved to Los Angeles, and took a day job detailing limousines while he ran his dog-psychology business out of a white Chevy Astrovan. When he was twenty-three, he fell in love with an American girl named Illusion. She was seventeen, small, dark, and very beautiful. A year later, they got married.

"Cesar was a macho-istic, egocentric person who thought the world revolved around him," Illusion recalled, of their first few years together. "His view was that marriage was where a man tells a woman what to do. Never give affection. Never give compassion or understanding. Marriage is about keeping the man happy, and that's where it ends." Early in their marriage, Illusion got sick, and was in the hospital for three weeks. "Cesar visited once, for less than two hours," she said. "I thought to myself, This relationship is not working out. He just wanted to be with his dogs." They had a new baby, and no money. They separated. Illusion told Cesar that she would divorce him if he didn't get into therapy. He agreed, reluctantly. "The therapist's name was Wilma," Illusion went on. "She was a strong African-American woman. She said, 'You want your wife to take care of you, to clean the house. Well, she wants something, too. She wants your affection and love.' " Illusion remembers Cesar scribbling furiously on a pad. "He wrote that down. He said, 'That's it! It's like the dogs. They need exercise, discipline, *and* affection.' " Illusion laughed. "I looked at him, upset, because why the hell are you talking about your dogs when you should be talking about us?"

"I was fighting it," Cesar said. "Two women against me, blah, blah, blah. I had to get rid of the fight in my mind. That was very difficult. But that's when the light bulb came on. Women have their own psychology."

Cesar could calm a stray off the street, yet, at least in the beginning, he did not grasp the simplest of truths about his own wife. "Cesar related to dogs because he didn't feel connected to people," Illusion said. "His dogs were his way of feeling like he belonged in the world, because he wasn't people friendly. And it was hard for him to get out of that." In Mexico, on his grandfather's farm, dogs were dogs and humans were humans: each knew its place. But in America dogs were treated like children, and owners had shaken up the hierarchy of human and animal. Sugar's problem was Lynda. JonBee's problem was Scott. Cesar calls that epiphany in the therapist's office the most important moment in his life, because it was the moment when he understood that to succeed in the world he could not just be a dog whisperer. He needed to be a people whisperer.

For his show, Cesar once took a case involving a Chihuahua named Bandit. Bandit had a large, rapper-style diamond-encrusted necklace around his neck spelling "Stud." His owner was Lori, a voluptuous woman with an oval face and large, pleading eyes. Bandit was out of control, terrorizing guests and menacing other dogs. Three trainers had failed to get him under control.

Lori was on the couch in her living room as she spoke to Cesar. Bandit was sitting in her lap. Her teen-age son, Tyler, was sitting next to her.

"About two weeks after his first visit with the vet, he started to lose a lot of hair," Lori said. "They said that he had Demodex mange." Bandit had been sold to her as a show-quality dog, she recounted, but she had the bloodline checked, and learned that he had come from a puppy mill. "He didn't have any human contact," she went on. "So for three months he was getting dipped every week to try to get rid of the symptoms." As she spoke, her hands gently encased Bandit. "He would hide inside my shirt and lay his head right by my heart, and stay there." Her eyes were moist. "He was right here on my chest."

"So your husband coöperated?" Cesar asked. He was focussed on Lori, not on Bandit. This is what the new Cesar understood that the old Cesar did not.

"He was our baby. He was in need of being nurtured and helped and he was so scared all the time."

"Do you still feel the need of feeling sorry about him?"

"Yeah. He's so cute."

Cesar seemed puzzled. He didn't know why Lori would still feel sorry for her dog.

Lori tried to explain. "He's so small and he's helpless."

"But do you believe that *he* feels helpless?"

Lori still had her hands over the dog, stroking him. Tyler was looking at Cesar, and then at his mother, and then down at Bandit. Bandit tensed. Tyler reached over to touch the dog, and Bandit leaped out of Lori's arms and attacked him, barking and snapping and growling. Tyler, startled, jumped back. Lori, alarmed, reached out, and—this was the critical thing—put her hands around Bandit in a worried, caressing motion, and lifted him back into her lap. It happened in an instant.

Cesar stood up. "Give me the space," he said, gesturing for Tyler to move aside. "Enough dogs attacking humans, and humans not really blocking him, so he is only becoming more narcissistic. It is all about him. He owns you." Cesar was about as angry as he ever gets. "It seems like you are favoring the dog, and hopefully that is not the truth. . . . If Tyler kicked the dog, you would correct him. The dog is biting your son, and you are not correcting hard enough." Cesar was in emphatic mode now, his phrasing sure and unambiguous. "I don't understand why you are not putting two and two together."

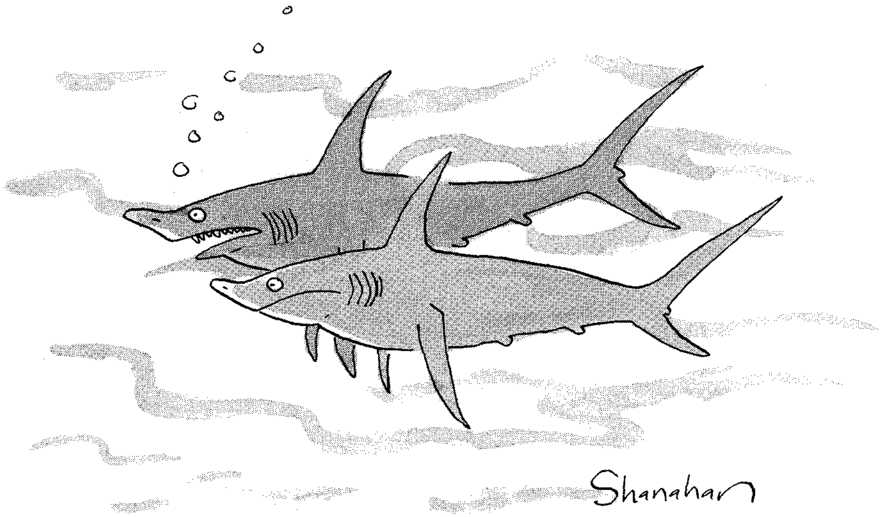
Bandit was nervous. He started to back up on the couch. He started to bark. Cesar gave him a look out of the corner of his eye. Bandit shrank. Cesar kept talking. Bandit came at Cesar. Cesar stood up. "I have to touch," he said, and he gave Bandit a sharp nudge with his elbow. Lori looked horrified.

Cesar laughed, incredulously. "You are saying that it is fair for him to touch us but not fair for us to touch him?" he asked.

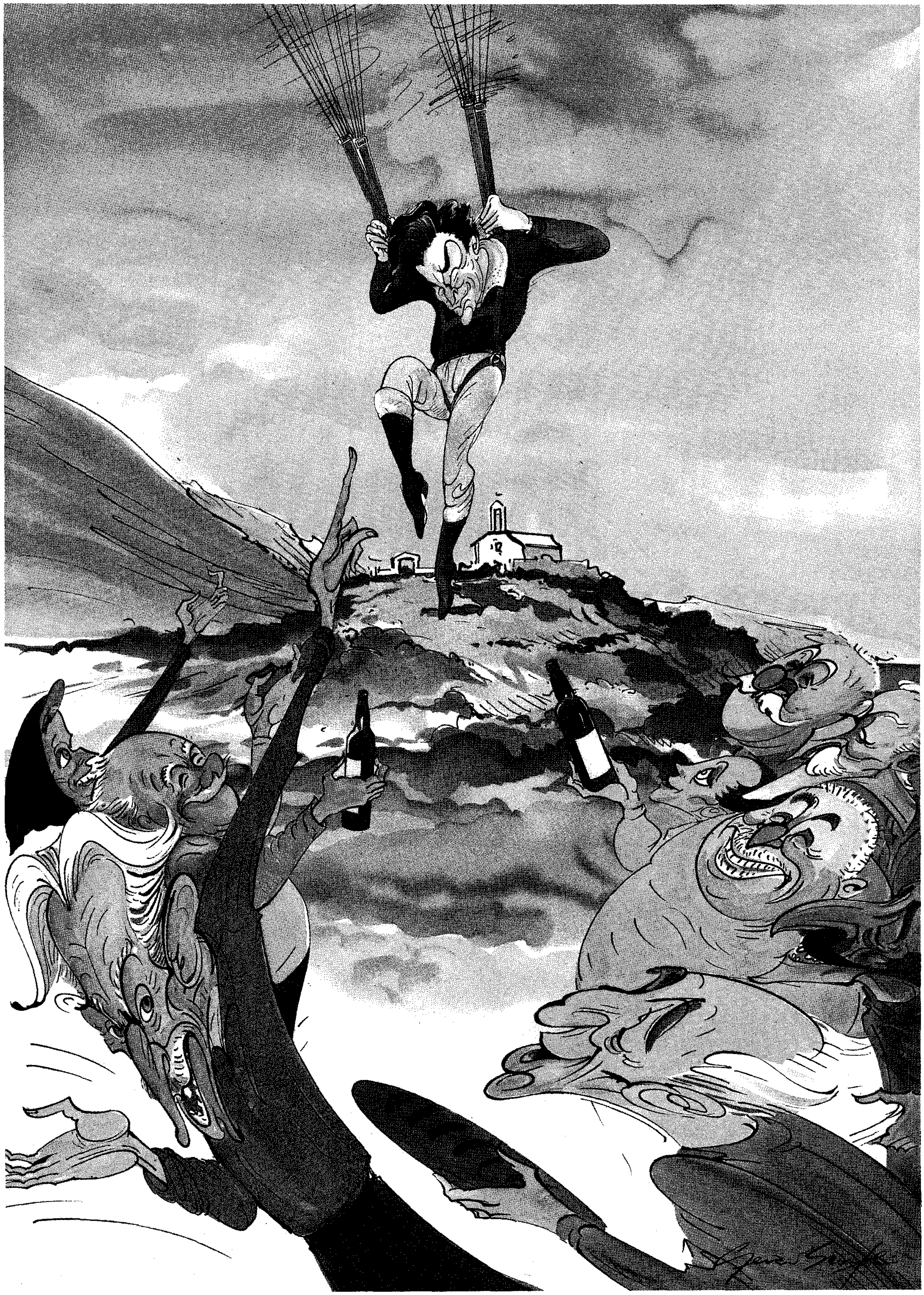
Lori leaned forward to object.

"You don't like that, do you?" Cesar said, in his frustration speaking to the whole room now. "It's not going to work. This is a case that is not going to work, because the owner doesn't want to allow what you normally do with your kids. . . .The hardest part for me is that the father or mother chooses the dog instead of the son. That's hard for me. I love dogs. I'm the dog whisperer. You follow what I'm saying? But I would never choose a dog over my son."

He stopped. He had had enough of talking. There was too much talking, anyhow. People saying, "I love you," with a touch that didn't mean "I love you." People saying, "There, there," with gestures that did not soothe. People saying, "I'm your mother," while reaching out to a Chihuahua instead of their own flesh and blood. Tyler looked stricken. Lori shifted nervously in her seat. Bandit growled. Cesar turned to the dog and said "Sh-h-h." And everyone was still. ♦



"What you need to watch is the snacking between frenzies."



Leigh Fermor, like T. E. Lawrence before him, has blurred the line we draw between the aesthete and the man of action.

LIFE AND LETTERS

AN ENGLISHMAN ABROAD

Patrick Leigh Fermor's journey through the twentieth century.

BY ANTHONY LANE

On the evening of April 26, 1944, an Opel staff car with slit hoods over its headlamps set off toward Knossos. To people who know Crete, Knossos refers to the myth-haunted remnants of the lost Minoan civilization on the northern shores of the island. It means Theseus and Ariadne, and the Minotaur brooding in his labyrinth. To the passenger in the car that night, however, Knossos meant home. His name was Heinrich Kreipe. He had recently arrived in Crete from the Russian front; he was shortly to be promoted from major-general to lieutenant-general in the German Army; he was now the commander of the 22nd Infantry Division, based near Heraklion, the principal city of Crete; and he lived close by, at the Villa Ariadne, in Knossos.

As the Opel, with its distinguished passenger sitting beside his driver, travelled toward Heraklion, it was waved down on a deserted bend. The time was half past nine. Two German corporals approached. One of them asked whether this was the General's car. "*Ja, ja*" was the reply. The darkness came alive. Doors were pulled open. Men rose from the ditches at the side of the road. The driver reached for his gun. He was smacked on the head with a cosh, heaved from his seat, and dropped on the road. Kreipe was moved to the back seat, with three Cretans to keep him company. A blade was held to his throat, but only one thing appeared to be troubling the General. He couldn't find his hat.

This was because his hat reposed on the head of the man who was now in the front passenger seat. His accomplice took the wheel, and the car moved off into the night. Ever nonchalant, the man in the hat lit a cigarette. The problem was that, in order to reach their destination, the kidnappers had to pass through Heraklion. The whole plan could be undone, with one cry from their prisoner, at a single checkpoint. What was troubling them was not a single checkpoint, however, but twenty-two separate checkpoints. Somehow, their luck held. At every post, the car was recognized and allowed to continue. When salutes were given, they were duly returned. At the West Gate of the city, the car was hailed and brought to a crawl by armed sentries. The two men in the front cocked their pistols. Loudly declaring that this was the General's car, they took their chance and sped on, crying "*Gute Nacht*" into the dark. They reached open country and off-loaded their prize. By mid-May, the Divisional Commander would be smuggled off the island in a motor launch and whisked away to Allied headquarters in Cairo.

The man in the hat had thus succeeded in his second impersonation of the night. First, he had dressed as a corporal, and then, complete with halting German, he had turned into General Kreipe. For the sake of the role, and with some reluctance, he had shaved off his mustache; without it, according to his comrade-in-arms, "he looked so much the dashing Teuton that beside him one felt uncomfortably close to the genuine article." Still, he was a man at ease with subterfuge, having spent the past seventeen months dressed as a shepherd in the spiny mountains of Crete. He was known as Mihali, and one account describes him as sporting "a finely embroidered Cretan bolero, a long, wine-colored cummerbund (into which were thrust an ivory-handled revolver and a silver dagger), a pair of corduroy riding breeches, and tall black boots." A blurry photograph confirms the image: one hand in a pocket, the other holding a cigarette, the face proud, sun-weathered, and suave. He looks like a hawk with a sense of humor.

But his name was not Mihali, and he was not Greek, any more than he was German. He was a major in the Special Operations Executive, a secret outfit established by the British to carry out clandestine sabotage, and to support local resistance movements, behind enemy lines. He was, and remains, an Englishman, with so much living to his credit that the lives conducted by the rest of us seem barely sentient—pinched and paltry things, laughably provincial in their scope, and no more fruitful than sleepwalks. We fret about our kids' S.A.T. scores, whereas this man, when he was barely more than a kid himself, shouldered a rucksack and walked from Rotterdam to Istanbul. In his sixties, he swam the Hellespont, in homage to Lord Byron—his hero, and to some extent his template. (He once hunted down a pair of the poet's slippers, "their toes turning up at the tip," in Missolonghi.) In between, he has joined a cavalry charge, played a game of polo on bicycles outside a Hungarian castle, observed a voodoo ceremony in Haiti, and plunged into a love affair with a princess. He has feasted atop a moonlit tower, with wine and roast lamb hauled up by rope. He has dwelled soundlessly among Trappist monks. He has built himself a house on the southern coast of Greece, where he still resides. He has written seven travel books and a novel, though which is which one cannot readily say, for the travel books pass from the fiercely empirical to the fantastic without drawing breath. The most celebrated, perhaps, are "A Time of Gifts" (1977) and "Between the Woods and the Water" (1986), which describe the first two-thirds of that footsore trek to Istanbul. Both have recently been reissued (New York Review Books; $16.95 and $15.95), raising once more the enticing prospect of a third and concluding volume. Long planned, it would take the author to the banks of the Bosporus and thus to the gates of the East. "I'm absolutely longing to get at it," he said to me. His name is Patrick Leigh Fermor—or, since the bestowing of a knighthood, two years ago, Sir Patrick. Or, as his friends call him, Paddy. He is now ninety-one years old, and if you

GERALD SCARFE

think you can match him ouzo for ouzo, on a back street in downtown Athens, you'd better think again.

Leigh Fermor was born on February 11, 1915, in London. Soon afterward, he lost his mother. She didn't die, but she went to India, to join her husband, Lewis Leigh Fermor, who was later to become the director of the Indian Geological Survey. It was not uncommon for children of colonial parents to be left behind in England; abandonment was one of the sacrifices demanded by the maintenance of empire.

For the first three and a half years of his life, Leigh Fermor lived with a family in the county of Northamptonshire. There, by his own admission, he became a "farmer's child run wild," and that strain of the *enfant sauvage* has never quite deserted either the grown man or the work. After the end of the First World War, his mother and his elder sister, whom he describes as "beautiful strangers," returned to fetch young Paddy, who promptly ran away from them over the fields. "Those marvellously lawless years, it seems, had unfitted me for the faintest shadow of constraint," he writes in "A Time of Gifts." The fact that somebody so dapper and so disciplined should persist in viewing himself as unconstrained may be a pleasing irony, but it is no delusion. His entire life has betrayed a Byronic impatience with fetters of any description, and, unsurprisingly, no school was able to keep him caged for long. A single, snaking sentence from "A Time of Gifts" suffices to conjure up one such establishment, "a co-educational and very advanced school for difficult children," and also to display the bright, elastic skin of Leigh Fermor's prose:

> It was run by a grey-haired, wild-eyed man called Major Truthful and when I spotted two beards—then very rare—among the mixed and eccentric-looking staff, and the heavy bangles and the amber and the tassels and the homespun, and met my fellow-alumni—about thirty boys and girls from four-year-olds to nearly twenty, all in brown jerkins and sandals: the musical near-genius with occasional fits, the millionaire's nephew who chased motor-cars along country lanes with a stick, the admiral's pretty and slightly kleptomaniac daughter, the pursuivant's son with nightmares and an infectious inherited passion for heraldry, the backward, the somnambulists and the mythomaniacs (by which I mean those with an inventive output more pronounced than the rest, which, as no one believed us, did no harm), and, finally, the small bad hats like me who were merely very naughty—I knew I was going to like it.

Later, Leigh Fermor became a pupil at King's School, Canterbury, a less peculiar haven. His third year there was summed up by his housemaster in a prescient report: "He is a dangerous mixture of sophistication and recklessness which makes one anxious about his influence on other boys." Leigh Fermor would have been about sixteen at the time, and even now he is as proud of that assessment—quoting it in conversation as well as citing it in "A Time of Gifts"—as he is of the fact that among the school's former pupils was Christopher Marlowe, the leading reprobate of English letters.

WmHamilton

"They didn't just meet at a wedding—they met at his wedding."

Leigh Fermor left King's under a cloud, although the cloud consisted mostly of silver lining. His mortal offense was to be found sitting on upturned apple baskets at the back of a local greengrocer's shop, holding the hand of Nellie, the greengrocer's daughter. Such wantonness manages to seem at once pastoral, precocious, and blithe: a fair hallmark, for all its innocence, of many adventures to come. It also presages a lifetime's helpless appeal to the opposite sex. "From the age of seven, one was always potty about someone," Leigh Fermor said to me, and the pottiness has been freely returned. As a rule, nature is judicious in the dispensing of talent; we are happy to revere George Eliot, say, secure in the knowledge that she looked like Seabiscuit. But Leigh Fermor was and remains unforgivably handsome, and some years ago I saw a woman in her early thirties make a determined play for him at a dinner party. It was a wise (if fruitless) choice. He was fifty years older than she, yet he wore that experience not as a burden, nor like a row of medals, but with a commanding modesty, just as he wore his suit. It was navy blue, of impeccable cut, from Huntsman of Savile Row; below it, his shoes gleamed like black mirrors. Of all the men in the room, Leigh Fermor was the only one to possess a quality that, though barely mentioned these days, defined both the professional energies and the casual pleasure-seeking of earlier generations: he had dash.

It was dash, after all, plus a perennial fear of boredom—and maybe a sense that, in comparison with events beyond the English Channel, England herself was in danger of becoming dreary—that had led Leigh Fermor to his momentous embarkation of 1933. He had left school and was sitting listening to "Stormy Weather" on the gramophone, with the music matched by the drumming of London rain. "A plan unfolded with the speed and completeness of a Japanese paper flower in a tumbler," he wrote. On December 9th, as "a thousand glistening umbrellas were tilted over a thousand bowler hats," the teen-ager left London, boarding a Dutch steamer at Irongate Wharf. He sported hobnail boots and a greatcoat. His rucksack contained, among other things, pencils, drawing pads, notebooks, and a volume of Horace. He would not see his homeland again until January, 1937, "for better or for worse, utterly changed by my travels."

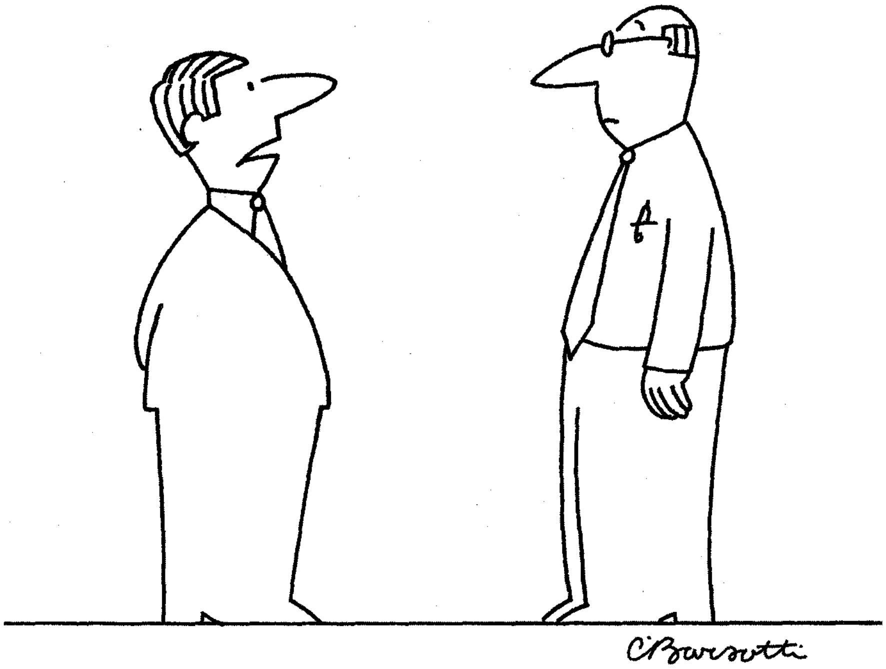
To read "A Time of Gifts" and "Between the Woods and the Water," these days, is to plunge into doubleness. On the one hand, they are—and can hardly help being—historical documents, tugging from the shadows a Europe that has all but disappeared. When the author, preceded by a letter of introduction, finds lodging in an Austrian castle, a few days' walk beyond Salzburg, he is greeted by an aging count, who was once an "Imperial and Royal Chamberlain" and "Captain of Horse" in the Hapsburg ranks. This leads Leigh Fermor to a wistful evocation of splendors now extinct: "The heralds were dispersed, the regiments disbanded and the horses dead long ago." When the host bids good night to his guest, "his hand felt as light as a leaf."

And yet, on the nights that preceded his arrival there, the young Englishman had slept in a barn, an apple-scented loft, and a cowshed. "There is much to recommend moving straight from straw to a four-poster, and then back again," he says. At moments like this, history seems to hang fire, and the books become a tribute to that wanderlust which is as permanent and chronic a feature of the human animal as heartache. The Leigh Fermor stamping across frozen fields in 1934 could equally be a poor scholar of 1434, tramping to one of the ancient universities, or a backpacker of 2004, minding his step on the road to a youth hostel: "There was a particular delight in treading across the hard puddle. The grey discs and pods of ice creaked under hobnails and clogs with a mysterious sigh of captive air: then they split into stars and whitened as the spiders-web fissures expanded," Leigh Fermor writes. He is fêted, nowadays, as an ardent Hellenophile, who is most at home in the resinous heat of Greece; all the more amazing, then, that he should have been bewitched by colder climes, and I still associate him with that spidery ice.

In "A Time of Gifts," he explains, with a cheerful apology, that his political creed at the time was a mixture of the naïve and the unthinkingly moderate. That is why his entrance into the ominous dawn of Hitler's Germany feels so true in the telling; he does not pretend to have known what he could not know. He winces at the S.A. troops who stand at attention in the Westphalian town of Goch, only to encounter them, later that night, "less fierce without their horrible caps," singing dreamily of maidens in a firelit inn, wreathed in smells of "beer, caraway seed, beeswax, coffee, pine-logs and melting snow." Set against that is his sour, unforgettable snapshot of a Nazi rendered powerless by beer: "Halfway up the vaulted stairs, a groaning Brownshirt, propped against the wall on a swastika'd arm, was unloosing, in a staunchless gush down the steps, the intake of hours. Love's labour lost." Shortly afterward, Leigh Fermor strays into "a room full of S.S. officers, Gruppen- and Sturmbannführers, black from their lightning-flash-collars to the forest of tall boots underneath the table."

Newcomers to the memoirs may well pause at that forest, as they may at the tankards, "heavier than a brace of iron dumb-bells," from which he glugged that night: "The gunmetal-colored cylinders were stamped with a blue HB conjoined under the Bavarian crown, like the foundry-mark on cannon." Ever since "A Time of Gifts" was published, in 1977, readers have asked, more in wonder than in accusation, how on earth Leigh Fermor could have summoned memories—not misted reveries but clusters of pin-bright details, like that tankard stamp—from a trip made more than forty years earlier. The author himself is awed by the task. "There are lost faces: a chimney sweep, a walrus moustache, a girl's long fair hair under a tam o'shanter. It is like reconstructing a brontosaur from half an eye socket and a basket full of bones," he writes. One method is to color and glue as you build. When I inquired about the blue-eyed scholar-gypsy whom he befriended in Persenbeug, Austria, in 1934, and whose virtues he lauds in "A Time of Gifts," Leigh Fermor happily owned up to having devised "a composite figure," sewn from a couple of acquaintances. "One of them was actually rather stupid but very good-looking; and he had a learned brother, who knew everything, who lived in Linz." He adds, "I've somehow woven the two together, you know." At the same time, Leigh Fermor's powers of remembering are genuinely prodigious. I sat next to him last year, before a dinner for his ninetieth birthday, and he crooned the verse of a Bulgarian song. There was a crackling fireplace beside us. "D'you know," Leigh Fermor said, "I haven't thought of that since I was twenty."

It still strikes me as a miracle that Leigh Fermor made it as far as Eastern Europe. Apart from the theft of his ruck-


CBarsotti

"But what you call a track record I call ancient history."

• •

"As you know, Russian roulette is not a game to be taken lightly."

• •

sack and passport, his trek of the early nineteen-thirties, even in towns riddled with Nazis or Hungarian forests infested by "affable highwaymen," seems to have been blessed by fortune. Crossing Transylvania alone, Leigh Fermor found himself in forgotten country estates, where "charm and *douceur de vivre* were still afloat," and left with his neck unbitten. "Between the Woods and the Water" takes him as far as Ada Kaleh, an island in the Danube, on the Yugoslav border. There he hears Turkish spoken, "dimly reminiscent of Magyar," and the call of the muezzin becomes the first hint of his intended destination. For the last lap of his pilgrimage, as yet unchronicled by the traveller himself, we must for now refer to "Words of Mercury," a tempting selection of his prose published in England in 2003. It was compiled by Artemis Cooper, who is currently writing Leigh Fermor's biography. From her introduction we know that he reached Istanbul on New Year's Day, 1935; that he went south and spent his twentieth birthday at a monastery on Mt. Athos; that he briefly hitched himself to a Greek cavalry regiment; and that he soon embarked on two simultaneous romances, one of which—with the land of Greece—has endured to this day.

The other was with a Romanian of noble blood named Balasha Cantacuzène. In the words of Leigh Fermor, "We immediately clicked," which, translated from the British, means, "We were absolutely nuts about each other." Leigh Fermor and I were drinking tea in the lobby of the Hotel Grande Bretagne, in Athens—the city where he had met Balasha, seventy years before. He described her to me. "Tall and slim, distinguished-looking, large eyes," he said, as if suggesting that she might walk in at any moment. They moved to a water mill on the coast, near the island of Poros, then back to Balasha's home, on the northern, Russia-scraping fringe of Romania, where life was, as he puts it, "rather Tolstoyan." As ever, when experience intensifies, Leigh Fermor reaches out to literature for reliable points of reference. Remembering a prewar trip to France with Balasha, for instance, he told me: "We stayed for three months in Grand Meaulnes country. Absolute bliss." Anybody who has read "Le Grand Meaulnes," Alain-Fournier's heart-seizing novel of 1913, will know that the fate of paradise—a rural mansion, a first love—is not that it will be lost but that, even if it continues to exist, you can never find it again. Hence the air of finality in Leigh Fermor's memory of a Romanian mushroom-picking party, "some in a carriage, some on horseback," in 1939. He told me, "Somebody shouted across the fields, 'The Germans have crossed into Poland.' We thought the war would last six months."

It would be wrong to say that the next six years of war made Leigh Fermor's name. That did not happen until the publication, in 1950, of "Ill Met by Moonlight," a spirited account of the Kreipe operation in Crete by W. Stanley (Billy) Moss, the friend of Leigh Fermor's who had sat beside him and driven the General's car. (In 1957, the book was made into a film of the same name, with Dirk Bogarde pleasantly miscast as Leigh Fermor.) Nevertheless, the war lent as much purpose to his life as it did to thousands of others', whetting the edge of his sympathies and skills. He is mildly guarded on the subject of Moss's book, perhaps because it pays insufficient dues to the importance of local Cretans in the exploit; Leigh Fermor was better equipped to appreciate them, having already acquired not just their patois but a lip-smacking taste for their bravado. At the outbreak of war, he had parted from Balasha, returned to England, enlisted in the Irish Guards, transferred to the Intelligence Corps, and found himself sent back in the direction he had come from. He fought first in Albania, against the Italians, as a liaison officer to the Greek Army, and then in Crete, against the Germans, who landed on May 20, 1941. The battle that followed, though it lasted less than a fortnight, was notably brutal—around four thousand Allied troops lost their lives—as were the reprisals against the native population after the island fell.

Most of the Allies who survived the fight were evacuated to Egypt, leaving the Cretans to mount a rebellious hit-and-run campaign against the occupying forces. Some of the British, though, made it a point of principle to come back. Among them was Leigh Fermor, who spent a year and a half in the mountains, helping to run the resistance, and existing under such deep cover that he became, for all intents and purposes, a citizen of Crete. This remains an honorable thing to be, demanding, in his opinion, blood loyalty, a worship of firearms, the taste for a long feud, an ear for the enticements of verse and song, and a flint-like quality of spirit—hard, but easily sparked. His fondest recital of it can be found in his introduction to "The Cretan Runner," by George Psychoundakis, who died in January of this year. The last time the volume was reissued, in 1999, Psychoundakis celebrated by going outside and firing a German rifle which he had purloined half a century before. That is my idea of a book launch.

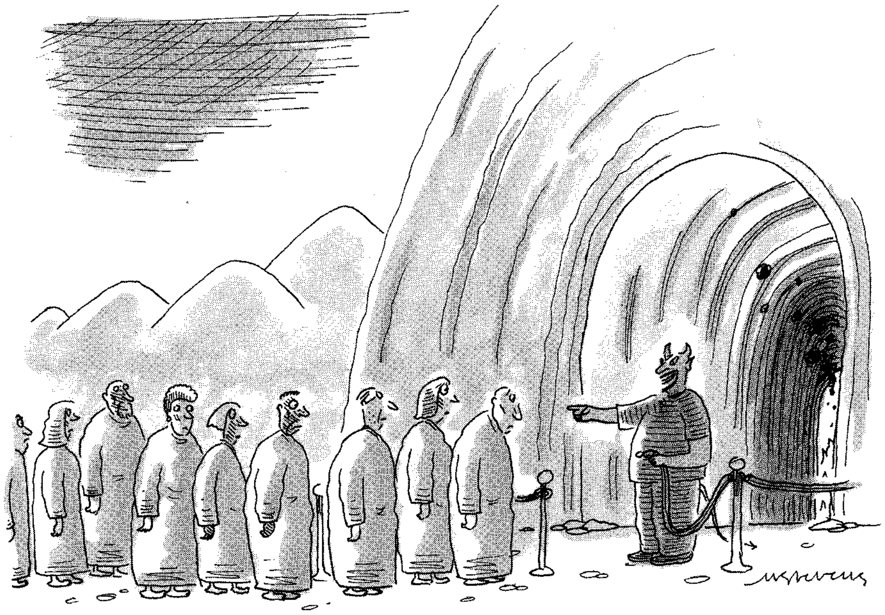
The title is accurate. Psychoundakis was the son of a poor mountain family, who, when he heard of the German invasion, offered his services to the cause. From then on, he would run across the broken-toothed crags of the island, mostly by night, bearing messages and arms between the resistance hideouts. The work was unpaid, unremitting, and loaded with risk; according to Leigh Fermor, three of the other runners "were captured and shot, two of them after long imprisonment and appalling tortures." Into the midst of these scurrying figures, and utterly dependent on their aid, came a strange conclave of English-speaking guerrillas: scholars, nomads, gentlemen warriors, tough nuts—the usual ingredients of secret operations at that time. In the words of Leigh Fermor, "The life was a troglodytic one," measured out mostly in caves, with "armies of vermin that manoeuvred in our torn and stinking clothes." Food was so scarce, he told me, that sometimes he and his comrades survived on grass and raw snails. On one occasion, he writes, "we spent a long oak-apple day in the branches of a tree while German raiding parties thrashed through the rocks and bushes below." Had Leigh Fermor been apprehended, he, too, would have been tortured to the verge of endurance, and then killed. The penalty for harboring him would have been what it was for harboring any British officer: the torching of a village, or even, as he writes, "the depopulation by massacre and execution of an entire valley."

So how can it be that the impression that lingers, in the accounts left by Leigh Fermor and his contemporaries, is, above all, one of fun? The obvious answer is that life can sometimes acquire a wilder flavor and a stronger concentration as the prospect of losing it draws near. In Leigh Fermor's case, his escapades were laced with a double dose of hospitality. First, there was Crete itself, whose people are exhaustively welcoming to guests, not least the unheralded stranger. If that habit was a godsend during the occupation, when the S.O.E. men were on the run, it became almost burdensome in peacetime. Leigh Fermor, returning in the early nineteen-fifties to tour the villages that had sheltered him in the war, had to battle his way through "seven or eight meals a day."

Second, there was Cairo, the base from which the secretive entry into Crete was launched, and, in the lore of the Second World War, almost a parody of glamorous intrigue. There Leigh Fermor and a few of his fellow-officers, presided over by a certain Countess Sophie Tarnowska, dwelled in a house of glittering and raucous repute: it was called Tara (home both to the High Kings of Ireland and to Scarlett O'Hara). Artemis Cooper has already given a vibrant account of this period in her book "Cairo in the War: 1939-1945." She describes Leigh Fermor and his friends as "under thirty, back from enemy-occupied territory and rejoicing in the fact of being alive. A fortune in back pay sat in their bank accounts." It was in Cairo, in late 1943, that the Kreipe plan was conceived, organized not by the higher authorities in S.O.E.—who would naturally be requested to endorse it—but by the adventurers themselves. "The kidnapping idea came to Moss and Leigh Fermor one evening in the Club Royale de Chasse et de Pêche," Cooper writes. No sentence captures more concisely the background noise to the life of chase and challenge—not merely in combat—that Leigh Fermor devised for himself. Hunting and fishing a general may well be a boost to the war effort, but it's also a good day's sport.

Recently, I visited the archives of the Imperial War Museum, in London, and consulted a copy of Billy Moss's diary from that time. Much of it went directly into "Ill Met by Moonlight," but certain passages were kept back—a pen portrait of Leigh Fermor in Cairo, for instance, "setting things on fire with incredible regularity," or sitting on a sofa between two women, singing "Stormy Weather." (The same tune, you will recall, had been playing on the gramophone, ten years earlier, when Leigh Fermor dreamed up his European march.) Other images of the S.O.E. group gleam from the diary pages. First, we find the men at the Cairo aerodrome, in early 1944, waiting to embark for Crete, "dressed like something out of 'For Whom the Bell Tolls,' with a cargo of rifles, a sack of gold, covered in revolvers and other strange gear." Next, there is Leigh Fermor, high over Crete, parachuting from the plane; as Moss recalls, "One moment he was with us—then gone, utterly and irretrievably gone. It was as sudden as death." Needless to say, he was retrievable, and, on April 4th, Moss, having finally come ashore in Crete himself, meets up with Leigh Fermor on a beach: "I can't describe how wonderful it was to see the old son of a gun again."

One episode, rising from the Cretan adventure, has passed without effort into myth. In the middle of "A Time of Gifts," Leigh Fermor suddenly sidles into a long parenthesis, and jumps from 1934 to 1944. He and his merry men, with a sul-



"You, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you . . ."

len Kreipe in tow, are in flight from the German patrols who have been sent to scour the hills:

> During a lull in the pursuit, we woke up among the rocks just as a brilliant dawn was breaking over the crest of Mount Ida. We had been toiling over it, through snow and then rain, for the last two days. Looking across the valley at this flashing mountain-crest, the general murmured to himself:
>
> *Vides ut alte stet nive candidum*
> *Soracte* . . .
>
> It was one of the ones I knew! I continued from where he had broken off:
>
> *nec jam sustineant onus*
> *Silvae laborantes, geluque*
> *Flumina constiterint acuto*,
>
> and so on, through the remaining five stanzas to the end. The general's blue eyes had swivelled away from the mountain-top to mine—and when I'd finished, after a long silence, he said: "*Ach so, Herr Major!*" It was very strange. As though, for a long moment, the war had ceased to exist. We had both drunk at the same fountains long before; and things were different between us for the rest of our time together.

High claims can be made for this moment. On the personal level, it marked the beginning of, if not a friendship, then a pact of understanding between the captive and his keeper. Beyond that, however, it feels like the end of something: the last, companionable gasp of a civilization—grounded in the knowledge of earlier civilizations, Roman and Greek—that had not just held sway in Europe for over a thousand years but had done more than any political truce or chicanery to bind Europe together. Both Leigh Fermor and Kreipe had been raised to recognize Horace Odes 1.9, to get it by heart, and to realize that the poem itself is a crystallization of our common feelings. Horace begins with a snow-cumbered mountain and ends with a finger—a girl's finger, half reluctantly yielding up a ring—and, in the midst of that zoom, he instructs us to uncork the wine, enjoy the dance, and leave the rest to the gods. It is the Leigh Fermor code of conduct to a tee.

Last year, with barely a stumble, Leigh Fermor declaimed Horace Odes 1.9 to me, six decades after he did so to General Kreipe. He also recited the first two stanzas of a translation of it that he had written at the age of sixteen, adding apologetically that the remaining verses had briefly slipped his mind. I recalled that copy of the Odes tucked into his baggage when he quit London in 1933, "at the age when one's memory for poetry or for languages—indeed for anything—takes impressions like wax and, up to a point, lasts like marble." The wandering boy used to give voice to poetry as he walked along, matching the feet of the verse to the march of his own feet, plowing through miles of Shakespeare, Keats, and Kipling, among others, venting a newfound love of Villon (a fellow-vagabond), and startling an old woman at the edge of a Swabian wood by shouting out a treasured burst of Virgil. For Leigh Fermor, literature is not something simply to conjure with, still less something to theorize about; it is both incantatory music and a body of accumulated wisdom, and one can live by its ordinances, or on its wealth of suggestion, much as a minister lives by the Scriptures.

That may be why, though Leigh Fermor is a tremendously easy man to like and to extoll, he is not an easy man to know. When people talk about him, they sound as if they were describing not a person but a book of short stories, or a favorite novel, from which there is always more to be unearthed. One of his achievements, like that of T. E. Lawrence before him, has been to blur the line that we draw between the aesthete and the man of action. Leigh Fermor's exploits, polished in the telling and retelling, acquire the burnish of nineteenth-century poems, while his delivery of poetry has a brisk, practical air that makes a sonnet seem as indispensable as a decent suitcase or a pair of binoculars—part of the well-made equipment that a gentleman should be expected to carry. Moreover, like many autodidacts, he sees no reason not to throw open to the public the overstocked library of his mind:

> The scattered Bektashi and the Rufayan, the Mevlevi dervishes of the Tower of the Winds, the Liaps of Souli, the Pomaks of the Rhodope, the Kizilbashi near Kechro, the Fire-Walkers of Mavrolevki, the Lazi from the Pontic shores, the Linovamvaki—crypto-Christian Moslems of Cyprus—the Dönmehs—crypto-Jewish Moslems of Salonika and Smyrna—the Slavophones of Northern Macedonia, the Koutzo-Vlachs of Samarina and Metzovo, the Chams of Thesprotia, the scattered Souliots of Roumeli and the Heptanese, the Albanians of Argolis and Attica, the Kravarite mendicants of Aetolia, the wandering quacks of Eurytania, the phallus-wielding Bounariots of Tyrnavos . . .

That is Leigh Fermor on the dispersal of Greek communities. The list covers two pages, includes what could be a line of Edward Lear ("the Shqip-speaking Atticans of Sfax"), and closes with the phrase "to name a few." It comes from his 1958 book "Mani," subtitled "Travels in the Southern Peloponnese," and one can understand why some readers, encountering the style for the first time, might find it too richly arrayed for their taste. The trick, surely, is to scan these passages as we would Marlowe's "Tamburlaine," with its litany of foreign conquests, or even Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky." Leigh Fermor is by no means spouting nonsense, but he is definitely spouting, and it is enough that we, in our ignorance, should revel in the play and cascade of words. He once used "bombinates," "amphisbaenas," "holorimes," and "deodars" within the space of a few paragraphs, although the context was a book review in the *Times Literary Supplement* titled "The Art of Nonsense," and so their appearance should be swallowed as an effervescent joke.

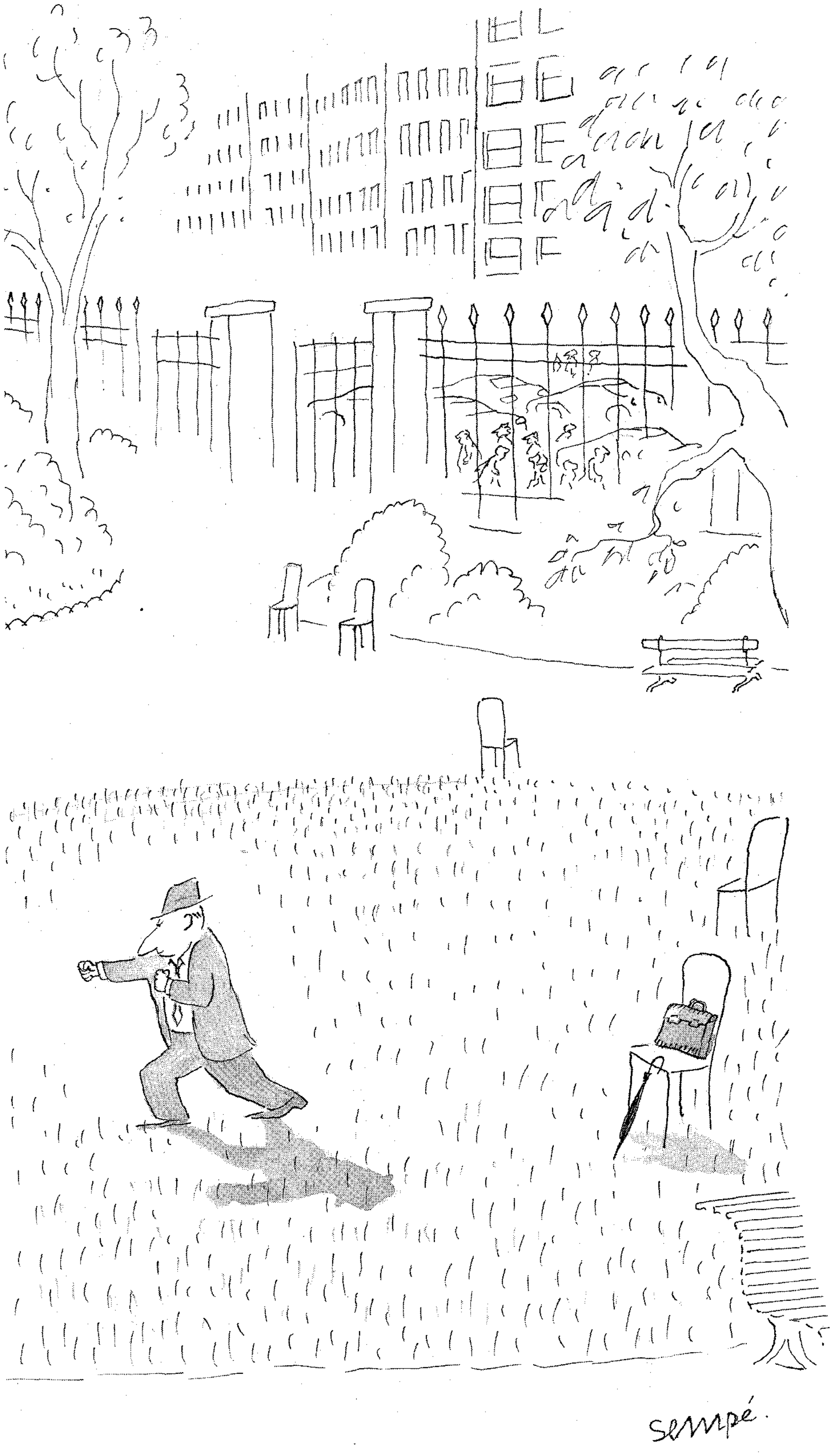
"Mani" and its twin, "Roumeli: Travels in Northern Greece," published eight years later (both will be reprinted here shortly by New York Review Books), are at once Leigh Fermor's most prolonged love letter to the country that became his adopted home and also our best guide to his movements after the war. Even then, the books can madden with their elusiveness, darting around in geographical space and anecdotal time. (It was both charming and heartening to learn, as I drove Leigh Fermor into Chania, in western Crete, some years ago, that his sense of direction is far from perfect. In a writer of travel literature, this seems to me not just forgivable but in many ways desirable. If you know exactly where you are heading and how to get there, what thrill can lie in store?) Even the dramatis personae assume an air of mystery, not least because Leigh Fermor often seems to be the only player onstage. Yet much of his wandering was not alone. In Cairo, during the war, he had met Joan Rayner, a British photographer, and they lived and travelled together, largely in Greece, for many years. In 1964, they bought a plot of land near the sea in the Mani, bereft of water and electricity, and built a house to Leigh Fermor's personal design. They married in 1968; there were no children. Joan died three years ago, and her husband lives there still.

The first mention of her comes in "The Traveller's Tree" (1950), a book on the Caribbean that Leigh Fermor produced after touring the islands in 1947-

1948. (They were also the setting for his only work of fiction, "The Violins of Saint-Jacques," published in 1953.) There she is in the index: "Rayner, The Hon. Mrs. Joan." The ensuing text offers a few tantalizing strokes of a sketch. How can one not warm to a woman who announces her intention of going to sleep "chained to a chameleon," which will stay by her side and lick the mosquitoes from the darkness before they invade her flesh? Nevertheless, she is, as Leigh Fermor confesses, "whittled now to shadows" by the rest of the book, and it is therefore his eye, and the recording of its perceptions, on which we come to depend. Leigh Fermor is no solipsist, and yet, for a gregarious soul, he is formidably self-contained.

The work in which that paradox is most neatly enshrined is "A Time to Keep Silence," first published in 1953. It is his shortest book (and to my mind his best), a quarter of the length of "The Traveller's Tree," and its hammered terseness is both something of a relief, after the silken sentences that unroll elsewhere in Leigh Fermor, and a good match for the sobriety of the subject. It is a study of the monastic experience—specifically, an account of two brief periods that Leigh Fermor spent as a guest of French monks. First comes the Benedictine order of St. Wandrille, near Rouen; then the abbey of La Trappe, a stronghold of the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance, better known as Trappists. "A bitter cactus-land of expiation," Leigh Fermor calls the latter, and yet he is inescapably pulled toward the rigor of the regime that the monks espouse and the tranquillity that it breeds in their character. Most confound their reputation by being tough, shrewd, humorous, and alive to worldly concerns—all qualities that endear them to Leigh Fermor. "Oh, I wanted somewhere to write," he replied, when I asked him why he had sought such sequestered enclaves, but his airy explanation did not wholly convince. There exists in his nature, cohabiting with the clubman, the guerrilla, the grandee, the bon vivant, and the storyteller—or buried far below them—a hard streak of the penitent. It derives not from an aesthetic pose, or from a stirring of religious vocation, although Leigh Fermor is stern toward those who mock such a calling out of hand. It springs, I suspect, from the same lonely, near-masochistic impulse that impels the congenital wanderer: "The

SKETCHBOOK BY J. J. SEMPÉ

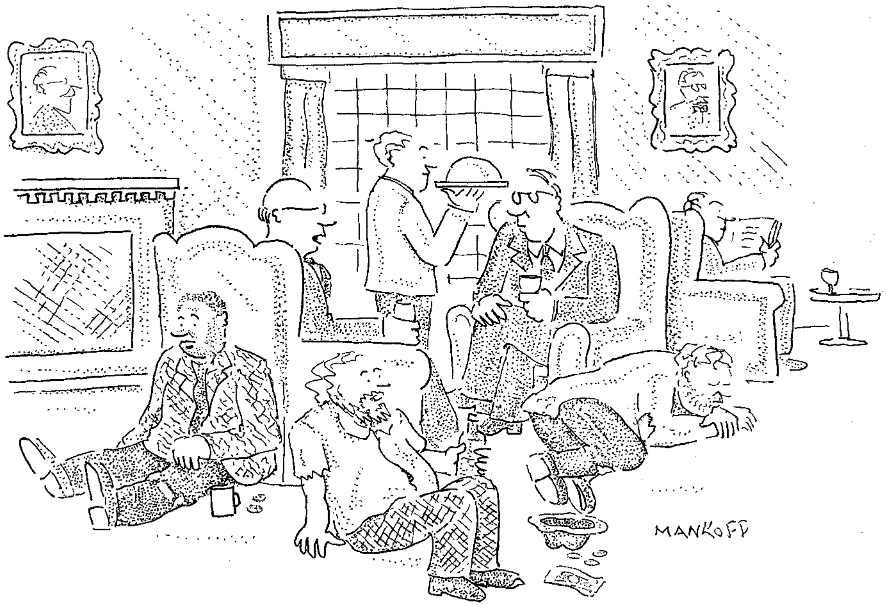


strangers who form the deepest regard for Greece," as he writes in "Roumeli," "are not the ones who are bear-led; they are the solitaries whose travels lead them, through chance or poverty or curiosity, along the humble and recondite purlieus of Greek life."

When I first set eyes on Leigh Fermor, the notion that he could be, or had ever been, taken for anything but an English gentleman seemed laughable. He strode into the room (the stride alone was a giveaway), wearing a dark-blue blazer, pressed flannels, and a regimental tie. His accent, as he introduced himself, was clipped and urbane, and it marked him immediately as a member of a breed. He still owns a house in the Vale of Evesham, on the border of the counties of Worcestershire and Gloucestershire, which he and his wife used as a homeland base, and when I went there sometime later the scene was an incarnation of half-vanished Englishness: dark wood panelling, solid Sunday lunch, and feathery summer hedgerows in the lanes.

Few people in the United Kingdom still live like this, and Leigh Fermor seems to have gravitated into friendship with those who do. He joined the Brigade of Guards with a Scottish nobleman named Sir Iain Moncrieffe of that Ilk, and they became friends for life. As for the short work entitled "Three Letters from the Andes," in which Leigh Fermor describes a fraught expedition to Machu Picchu and beyond, undertaken with friends in 1971, the first sighting of exotic fauna, for British as well as American readers, is likely to come not with the flight of the condor, on page 30, but in a series of footnotes appended to the first page, in which those friends are identified: "Lord Kinross, writer and historian." "Duke of Devonshire MC [Military Cross]."

Why, you might say, should we follow the tracks of the aristocratic into a mountain atmosphere as rarefied as their own origins? Even allowing for the serious thrust of the reading material that they had packed ("Robin's got 'The Bostonians,' Andrew, 'The Spoils of Poynton,' André, 'Crome Yellow' and 'Antic Hay,' and Carl is deep in my 'Oliver Twist' "), is there not an inescapable whiff of the posh imperial jaunt? The answer is that Leigh Fermor, in the ardor of his existence as in his writing, lies at the opposite extreme from the old imperial disdain. If the British Empire felt impelled to reap what it could from foreign soil, not a scrap of that mercenary hunger has survived in Leigh Fermor; he exults in the otherness of the far-flung place—in the precise degree to which Greece, Germany, Haiti, or "the lion-colored uplands of Anatolia" do not resemble the contours, moral and geological, of his native land. He demands nothing from those countries save an opportunity to slip quietly under their skin. In this he could not be less of a Little Englander, and his readers are free to enjoy the fact that this quintessential Englishman is, before anything else, a man of the world. No wonder his home in the Mani faces out to sea.



"Face it, Davis. The poor will always be with us."

Still, one has to ask: How did this fellow ever pass muster as a Greek? If German soldiers, on the trail of the S.O.E. in the Cretan valleys, had tracked him to a cave, was his communal copy of "David Copperfield" ("read and re-read and falling to bits") the only detail that would have betrayed him? The fact remains that in the company of Greeks he does indeed relax, somehow slipping the moorings of British reserve, and his range of gesture thaws and expands as if feeling the heat of the sun. Last summer, I watched him climb into an Athenian taxi. He sat in the front so that he could talk to the driver, and by the end of the ten-minute trip they were the firmest of friends. "Most interesting chap," he said, after a volley of effusive farewells.

That day, we held a working lunch. This began, and all but ended, at the apéritif stage. When ouzo is served, a jug of water is placed beside your glass, with which you may choose to dilute the hellbrew. Leigh Fermor did not. We had a couple of ice cubes each, enough to turn the clear poison a clouded white, but nothing else. A friend of mine claims that ouzo's particular gift is to destroy the central nervous system without being detected, like a computer virus. Possibly. After the third, I wondered aloud whether we should eat something. "Eat?" Leigh Fermor said, intrigued by such a notion; it was as if I had suggested a balloon ride, or a séance. We ordered a salad, and a bottle of strong red wine. Once that was emptied, and once the teen-age waitress had melted before the courteous, not to say flirtatious, banter of a man some seventy years older than she, we paid and left. I noticed that it was gone five o'clock and that, in less than an hour and a half, we would both be addressing the audience at a friend's book launch. Leigh Fermor declared that he would return to the hotel for a brief sleep. "Could you do me a favor?" he asked. "Wake me up exactly half an hour before I am due to speak," he said, "and give me a double whiskey."

None of this should be taken to imply inebriation. Leigh Fermor, like many people his age, has the constitution of an ox—an ox, moreover, with shining social connections and a grasp of etiquette that would shame a French ambassador. Un-

"Can't I ever be critical without being accused of criticizing?"

like him, I have not leaped naked from a Romanian river and collapsed into a hayrick beside laughing, sickle-bearing peasant girls with "sunburnt and rosy cheeks and thick dark plaits"; I have not journeyed to the volcanic cones of the early Cappadocian monasteries; and I shall certainly never be a holder of the D.S.O.—the Distinguished Service Order, the second-highest British award for valor in the face of the enemy. (Leigh Fermor won his after the abduction of General Kreipe. It was pinned to a jacket worn over his pajamas as he lay in a Cairo hospital, depleted and feverish in the wake of Crete.) For gallantry in the face of liquor, however, I can just about keep pace with him, yet even I watched in astonishment as he sat at his desk in the hotel, rested and whiskey-warmed, and made final, compellingly sober adjustments to his speech. His published works suggest a writer of unyielding fluency, never lost for words, and one tends to commit the basic error, when faced with such Mozartean ease, of presuming that creativity is no sweat. In fact, the typewritten sheet that lay before him was overlaid with blue-black runic rethinks and cobwebs of illegible addenda, strung between the lines and spun to the brink of the page.

Later, I went to Leigh Fermor's room to say good night. He lay there in bed, bespectacled, wearing a pair of short-sleeved pajamas of a gloom-brightening royal blue. Beside him lay two books. They were by Evelyn Waugh and Sir Thomas Browne. I took the Waugh—"Scoop," which for some insane reason I had devoured for the third time in a year—and turned to a favorite passage, about a long and ponderous lunch. As I read aloud, Paddy lay there smiling and delivering small grunts of familiarity and joy. It was like reading a bedtime story to a small boy. Then I picked up the Browne and chose "A Letter to a Friend" (or, in full, "A Letter to a Friend, Upon Occasion of the Death of His Intimate Friend"), published in 1690. The Browne manner is an obvious forerunner of the Leigh Fermor style, with its unabashed complications coming to rest on a thought, or a thing, of complete simplicity. Hence the exquisite tact, common to both men, of breaking bad news with such grace that it ends up sounding good:

> Upon my first Visit I was bold to tell them who had not let fall all hopes of his Recovery, That in my sad Opinion he was not like to behold a Grasshopper, much less to pluck another Fig. . . . Tho we could not have his Life, yet we missed not our desires in his soft Departure, which was scarce an Expiration; and his End not unlike his Beginning.

I looked up from the book, suddenly aghast that what I had read could be construed by the aging listener as impertinent, or tasteless, but I needn't have worried. He was asleep.

If Leigh Fermor's ninetieth birthday is any guide, he will have many more grasshoppers to behold. The party, at a friend's house in Worcestershire, was crammed with his contemporaries, mostly women—a dwindling but formidable band, fearless in their conviction that life is there for the plucking. To an extent, theirs is a generational stance. They grew up between the two world wars, with many friends and siblings killed along the way, and what was left, in that lull between calamities, was a dismissal of grand illusions in favor of a more Horatian sense that friendship, travelling, and flourishes of desire should fill one's days; that little else, indeed, can be trusted to banish ennui. There is no universal term for it—for the elegant, uncomplaining angle at which Leigh Fermor and his kind stand in relation to the world—although, fittingly, the best approximation is in Greek. The word *leventiá*, he writes in "Roumeli," comprises

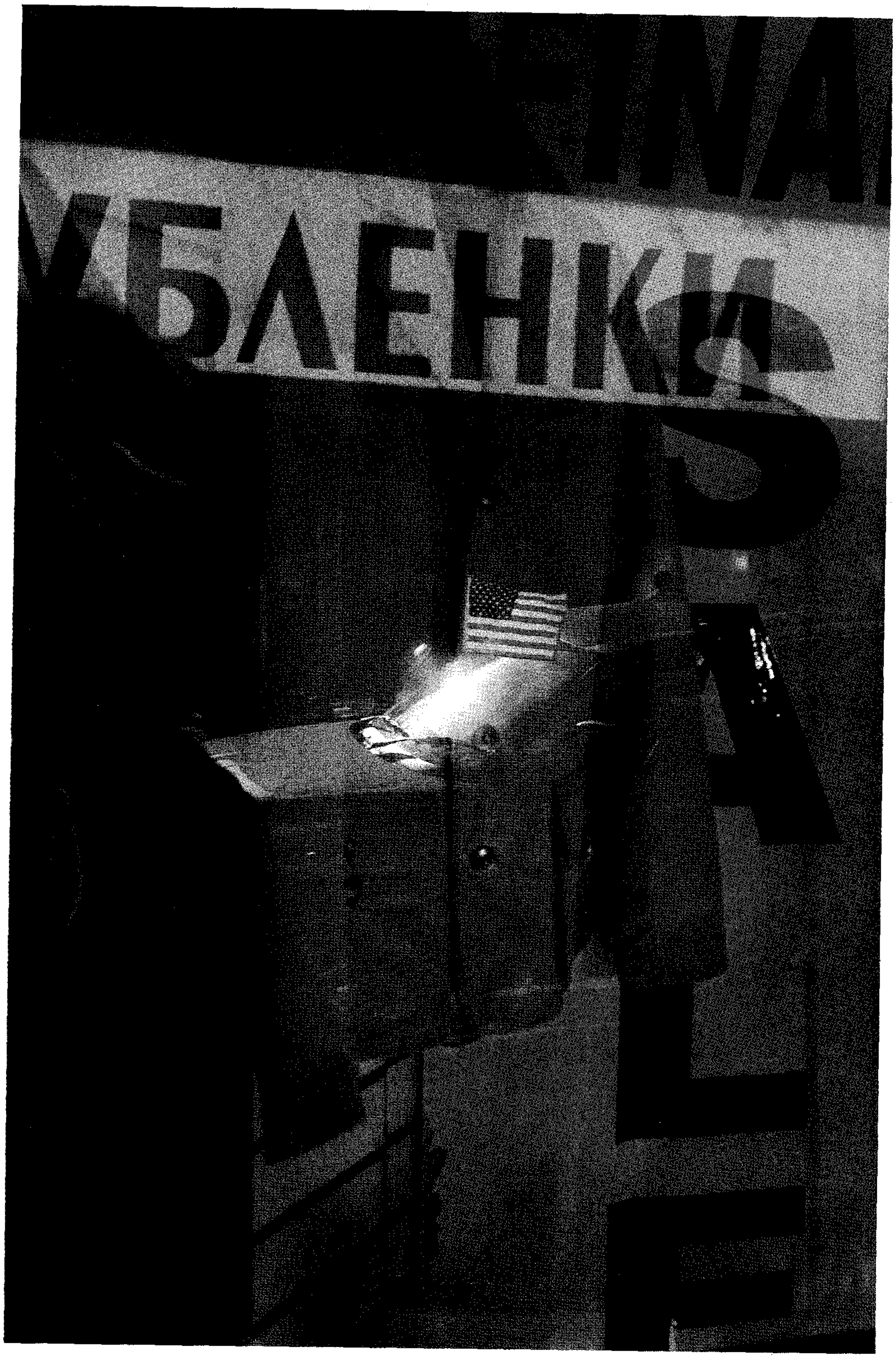
> the dash and fire of youth, a cheerful temperament, courage, speed, quick reactions, good looks, skill in singing, dancing, marksmanship, capacity for wine-drinking and fun, often accompanied by *meraklidilíki*, its sartorial expression.

My abiding memory of Patrick Leigh Fermor comes from Crete, eight years ago. We had spent time there, and I wanted to know how he would be returning to the mainland: a flight to Athens, presumably, followed by a taxi to the Mani. On the contrary, he said; he would board the overnight ferry. I offered at least to book him a cabin, since the night could be cold. (This to a man who knows as much as anyone alive about sleeping under the stars.) He smiled and replied that he would prefer a chair on deck, adding, "My dear boy, I have a bottle of red wine and a copy of 'Persuasion.' What more could I possibly need?" Within that question lie the two competing virtues that have fed his prose and fuelled his inimitable life: a settled wisdom, plus the itch to be elsewhere. Here he was, at eighty-three, taking ship in the company of Jane Austen, one of his few peers in the art of the imperturbable. I could well imagine the pair of them at close of day: side by side, exchanging compliments, taking a little wine, and watching the old world slip away. ♦

FICTION

CINDERELLA SCHOOL

BY LARA VAPNYAR



The ad read, "CINDERELLA SCHOOL. Learn English to find your dream. Fast, affordable, flexible hours." And, in smaller letters, "Russian-speaking English teacher wanted. English teacher's diploma required." I found it in *Our Brooklyn*, the thickest and the trashiest of all the Russian newspapers. I scrambled out of bed, dug up my diploma from the Moscow State Pedagogical University, and, without giving it much thought, carefully printed "and English" next to the words certifying that I could teach Russian language and literature.

A couple of weeks earlier, my husband, Vadim, had told me that the only people who could make it in immigrant businesses were dishonest and unprofessional. According to his theory, I now had a fair chance at success.

The next day, I put the diploma in my purse, took the Q train down to the Sheepshead Bay stop, and walked up a side street. Once there, I had to double-check the address, because the place didn't really look like somewhere you'd go to teach or learn. It was just a regular two-story house, painted blue, with a gray coat of dirt and a white sign in front that said "Alternative and Holistic Medicine" in big Russian letters, and "Witchery and Magic" in smaller ones. Inside, I found myself in an airy waiting room adorned with posters and framed clippings from *Our Brooklyn*. The largest poster showed a woman in her forties with teased blond hair and a piggish nose. "Evelina, an authentic witch from the woods of western Ukraine, will help you with your financial and romantic problems," it said. The other posters were devoted mostly to the miracles performed by Dr. Solomon, a severe-looking man with close-cropped graying hair. Dr. Solomon claimed to have the ability to cure obesity, stomach ulcers, spinal disorders, and all kinds of anxiety. Penises in various stages of decline were depicted in some of the posters. One of them was represented by a wilting daisy, another by a sad little mouse. I was about to check the address again when a woman at the reception desk squinted at me through heavy makeup and asked me what I wanted. I showed her the ad. She pointed to a door on her right and told me to go and wait for Dr. Solomon there.

JELENA VUKOTIC, "BRIGHTON BEACH" (2006)

This room was small and dimly lit. The wall to my left was painted red, and a huge poster for the Kieslowski movie "Blue" hung in the middle of it. The wall to my right was painted blue and had a poster for Kieslowski's "Red." Almost every other object was black (the leather lounge chair, the massive desk by the window, the small file cabinet), except for the collection of plastic penises on the desk. These were mostly pink, although one was cream-colored, and two or three were purplish-red. I did my best to ignore them.

Ten minutes later, the door opened with a bang, and the man from the posters marched in. He wore a tweed jacket that was a little too long for him. He was stocky and short, just an inch or two taller than me.

"What is your name?" he asked in Russian.

"Genya. I mean, Evgenia Levina."

"Sit down," he said. I looked around. There was no place to sit except for the lounge chair. I sat, with my butt just a foot off the floor, my legs sticking out in front of me, and my head uncomfortably tilted back. Dr. Solomon asked if I had brought my diploma. I took it out of my bag. He put on his glasses, glanced at the diploma, then peered at me. I wondered if it was his eyes or his pitch-black brows that made his expression so severe.

"I see everything that's going on inside you," he said.

My stomach grumbled.

"O.K., tell me," he continued in English, with the thick, tense accent of someone who was trying too hard to hide it. "How old are you?"

"Twenty-two," I replied in English, wondering if my accent sounded like his. He asked if I had seen "Red" and "Blue."

"Yes, I've seen them," I said.

"Who is more beautiful, Juliette Binoche or Irène Jacob?"

I turned my head to the right, then to the left.

"Juliette Binoche," I said.

"Why?"

"Because Irène Jacob is pure soul. Pure soul cannot be beautiful."

He took his glasses off and stared at the posters.

"You know what?" he said, switching back into Russian. "That is an absolutely brilliant answer—a professor from Columbia wouldn't have answered better."

I wanted to appear skeptical. I tried to affect a look of ironic detachment, but instead I felt a smile of pure delight spread across my face.

He told me that my first class would start at nine the next morning.

Vadim didn't like it when I called him at work, and I usually didn't. But that day I simply couldn't wait. I couldn't even wait until I got home. I fished a sticky quarter out of the pocket of my jeans and dialled his number from a pay phone. "Do you have a minute?" I asked. He said that he didn't. We hung up. I started to walk toward the subway, but a minute later I returned and fished another quarter out of my pocket. "It'll only take a second," I said. "O.K., I got a job, and I'll tell you all about it when you come home. Bye." But, just as I was about to hang up, I added, "It's a very good job. Really. Bye."

Vadim and I had come to the U.S. the year before. I didn't know anyone in our wave of Russian immigrants who hadn't been able to find a job within the first six months of arriving in the country—and a decent, respectable job at that. In Manhattan, or, if worst came to worst, in New Jersey. Gone were the years when Jewish immigrants to America fled Russia with just a few dollars in their pockets, when they had to fight for survival, when they had no choice but to work menial jobs. We hadn't come to the U.S. for survival; we had come for success. If one of us failed, it was his own fault, and his own shame.

Vadim found a job within a month. In Russia, he had been a computer programmer. Here, he bought a Sunday New York *Times*, circled some ads in the Help Wanted section, sent out his résumé, had a couple of interviews, and got a job. Just like that.

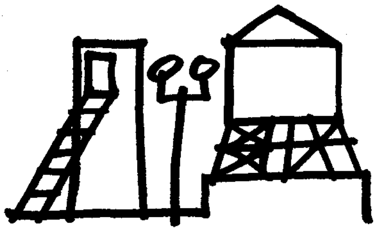
When I opened the Help Wanted section for the first time, I felt optimistic, too. I knew that my profession wasn't as popular as computer programming, but I believed that I had what it took to be successful. My parents, who were both struggling in new marriages and old jobs, had always said that I was the only thing they'd done right in their lives. I tended to agree with them. I was creative, I was persistent, I was a quick learner, I had an open mind, I didn't bend under pressure, and I didn't mind hard work. More than anything, I was addicted to praise and others' esteem, but this, too, I took as a sign that my success was inevitable. I carefully read the entire Help Wanted section and circled all the positions that sounded promising, from language-arts teacher at a prestigious private school, to creative manager in a large corporation, to film critic.

During those first weeks in New York, Vadim and I went to Manhattan every chance we got. We'd take the Q train into the city and exit at a different stop each time. This way, we thought, we would experience the city at random, not as tourists but as explorers. There was such a thrill in going up the subway steps without knowing what we would see at the top, whether it would be a bunch of skyscrapers, a park, a Korean deli, or a fancy restaurant. We walked the streets hand in hand, choosing our direction based on the street lights. If the light was green, we walked forward; if the light was red, we turned. Sometimes we had to run across the street, and we ran, laughing, squeezing between people, jumping over puddles. As we stopped to catch our breath, we felt the joy of having "made it," of belonging to this city that we had known only through movies.

So strong was my optimism that it held against all odds for many months. Even as all of my job applications went unanswered, even as I was running out of ads to respond to, I kept reading and circling, reading and circling, steadily shedding my vanity and lowering my horizons. "Oh, no," a woman said to me at one office, where I'd applied to be a receptionist. "We need somebody who speaks English." This came as a shock. I had been very proud of my English, and proud of the fact that I could speak, read, and understand American movies more easily than Vadim and his friends. But my English, it seemed, was not nearly good enough for working with people. Or even with animals, apparently, as I discovered when I was rejected for a job as a receptionist in a veterinary clinic. To think I'd applied to be a language-arts teacher! I imagined how people must have laughed when they read my résumé, how they must have mocked my vanity, my stupid enthusiasm, my ungrammatical bragging. One day, I took several months' worth of the *Times* and shoved it down the garbage chute. The paper got stuck, and I tried to push it down with my beaded Chinese slipper. I whacked and whacked, and suddenly the pile gave in and went down, along with my slipper. For a whole day, our furious super walked around with my slipper in his hands, like the prince in the Cinderella story, yelling that he was going to go to every apartment and find the asshole who'd stuffed paper down the chute.

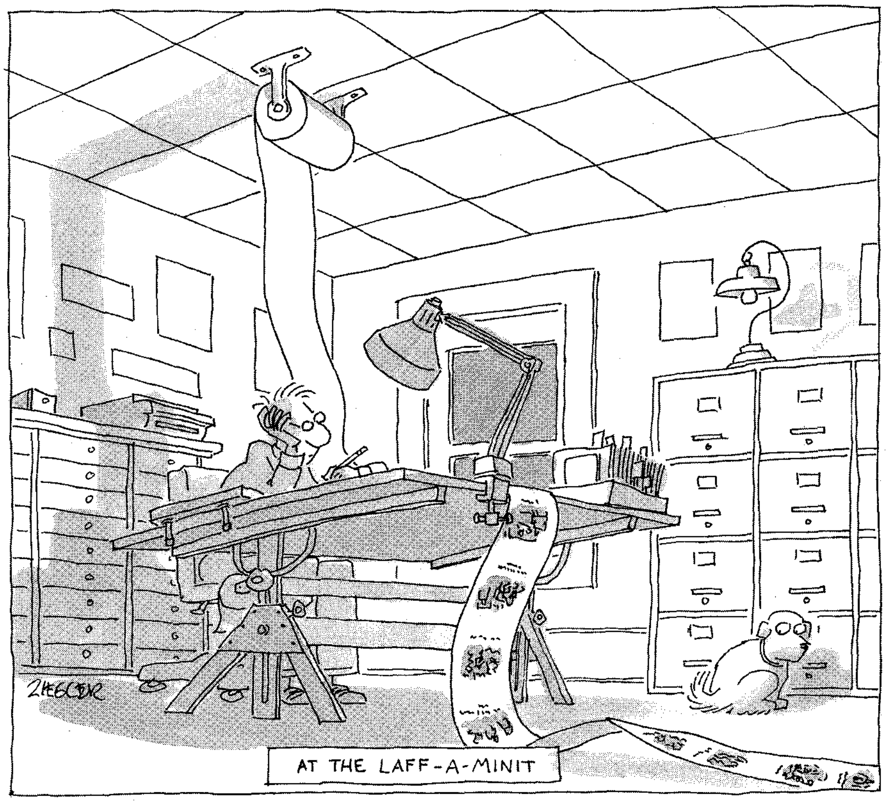
I couldn't bear to go to Manhattan anymore. I imagined that the city was off limits for me, enclosed by a glass screen. I could see everything through the glass; I could admire it, but I couldn't break through. Vadim said that he was getting sick of Manhattan, too. He had to take the Q train to midtown every day, and he complained about the crowds and the dirt. He was thinking of buying a house in the suburbs, but with only one salary, he pointed out, this was just a pipe dream. Vadim seemed to have changed dramatically since we'd come. In Russia, he had been shy, skinny, and shaggy-haired. Now he was square and trim, with a new confidence shining from him like the synthetic glow of his Century 21 suits. He was twenty-six, but he looked almost forty.

There were only two options left for me in my job search. The first, suggested by Vadim, was to take a class and learn a more lucrative profession, something like accounting, or even computer programming. One of his friends objected: "Computer programming? Your Gen'ka? The industry's overflowing with shitty programmers as it is!" The second option was to find a temporary position with one of the Russian-immigrant businesses, which would buy me some time to figure out a better path to success. Vadim laughed at me when I first bought a copy of *Our Brooklyn*. He said that the jobs advertised there were low-paying, humiliating, and often illegal. I said that I didn't care. Vadim laughed some more. I yelled, "Go to hell!," and took the paper with me to bed, the only place that still felt friendly. It wasn't long before I understood the reason for his scorn. Even the hardest and the lowest-paying jobs advertised in *Our Brooklyn* required skills, experience, or some special quality that I didn't have. I had never nursed a sick person, painted a house, driven a cab, cooked gefilte fish, or baked meat pies. In a Russian video store, where I'd hoped to impress everybody with my knowledge of world cinema, I was told that I didn't look lively enough. Actually, what the manager said was that I looked like "a dying fly." I was beginning to see that not only was I not born for success; I was quite possibly entirely useless.



On my first day at the Cinderella School, I had only one student. The waiting room was empty when I got there, except for the receptionist, a small puffy woman in her sixties, who introduced herself as Adella. She led me into a tiny room, which was furnished with a school desk, a VCR and a TV set on a stand, and a row of folding chairs, and told me to write something. "I need you to look busy when they arrive," she said. I asked if there were many students. She shrugged and said that it was hard to make people pay when there were so many free English classes around.

The doorbell rang at about nine-ten. I grabbed a sheet of paper from the neat pile on the desk and quickly wrote "have, had, had," "go, went, gone," and "to be or not to be," while Adella took money from a large woman in glossy boots. The woman sat down across from me. She leaned over and told me that her name was Marina and that she wasn't "a Jew, like you all." I didn't know what to say to that, so I said, "O.K." Then she told me that she wasn't staying in the U.S.—she had just come for a few months, because her husband had some kind of business here. She didn't want to waste time, she explained, or she would have gone to one of the free classes. "I don't need this," Marina



AT THE LAFF-A-MINIT

added, pointing to the pile of textbooks on my desk. "I need to know what to say when I'm shopping, that's all."

"So what are you going to teach them?" Vadim had asked me the night after my interview, over a celebratory dinner of Oscar Mayer franks and Del Monte canned peas. Ever since he found a job, he'd been the one to dominate our dinner conversations. He'd describe the hip swivel chair in his office, or the great view from the window in the hallway, or the wonderful variety of dishes at the salad bar where he ate lunch every day. He said that the salad bar was the ultimate symbol of the American concept of freedom. "You have no idea what to teach them, do you?" he asked, dipping his frank in a puddle of ketchup. "I was trained as a language teacher," I said. "It doesn't really matter which language."

Teaching Marina turned out to be even easier than I'd expected. She pulled out a crumpled notebook and read through a list of sentences in Russian: "This skirt is too small," "I don't want a dress with a leather belt," "Another store has the same, but cheaper." I wrote down the English equivalents and taught her how to pronounce them. When the lesson was over, I said that the next time I'd bring a video of "Pretty Woman" and we'd go over the dialogue in the shopping scene. "Oh, yeah," she said. "Yeah! This is my favorite movie ever." As she left, she was happily muttering, "When are you having a big sale?"

When I headed for the door, I heard a muffled conversation coming from Dr. Solomon's office. "Your penis becomes big and hard . . . and stays that way," he was saying. "You're strong. You're powerful. Nothing frightens you. Nothing intimidates you." I stood and listened, hardly breathing, until Adella broke the spell.

"Come tomorrow at ten," she said. "I hope to get more people for you."

The next day, I had a group of four women between the ages of thirty and sixty. They said that they liked the idea of "flexible hours," because they worked as live-in nannies for other Russian families and couldn't attend classes that had a strict schedule. None of them had come to the U.S. to stay. Most were illegal immigrants, with husbands and children waiting for them back home. They needed English so that they could defect from their Russian employers to American families, who allegedly paid more and lacked the guts to abuse their nannies. We spent the first lesson studying basic introduction skills, and all their stories sounded more or less the same. "My name is Nadia. I'm from Moscow. I'm forty-seven years old. I have a husband and two sons. My youngest son won the inter-school model-building contest. I used to work as an engineer. I sleep on a mattress on the floor of the baby's room. I have high blood pressure. I'm going crazy with the baby's screaming all night long. The little shit gets his rest during the day, but I have to cook and clean the house." Some of Vadim's friends had hired Russian nannies. They complained that the nannies were stuck-up and lazy, that they swept dirt under the beds, let the children watch TV all the time, and talked back when criticized. I was eager to side with the nannies.

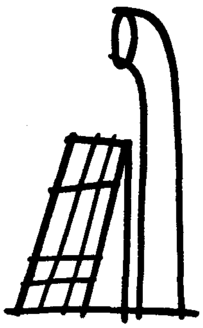
I spent the next couple of days preparing a special course for them. We studied the names of body parts, children's toys, cooking utensils, and cleaning products, and, most important, ways to ask for a raise. At the end of each lesson, we watched a scene from a movie. I brought in a large box of videos that Vadim and I had recorded from TV, and asked the nannies to choose. They picked "Mrs. Doubtfire," "Working Girl," and "Pretty Woman"—nobody could resist "Pretty Woman." This was their favorite part of the lesson. I asked them to listen to the dialogue and try to repeat the lines, and sometimes they even improvised. Where Julia Roberts said simply, "You work on commission, right?," Nadia said, "You bitches work on commission, right?"

By the end of the month, I had four groups of nannies and eight students who came for private lessons. One of them was Marina's husband, referred to me by his wife so that he could learn some business phrases. I wasn't sure what his line of business was, so when the time came to watch a movie I suggested either "Wall Street" or "The Godfather." He said that he'd rather watch "Jurassic Park." I tried to object, explaining that there were hardly any useful expressions in "Jurassic Park," but he put his meaty hand on my knee and said that I shouldn't worry about that, as long as he paid for the lessons.

On Mondays, my first class started at eight-thirty, and Vadim and I left for work at the same time. We ate our cereal leaning against the kitchen counter, dressed in a hurry, and ran to the Q stop together. Vadim took the steps up to the platform for the uptown train, and I crossed the street to get to the downtown platform. Often, if the trains didn't come right away, we'd wave to each other across the rails. It felt great to have a job to go to at last.

Gradually, I was getting to know the inner workings of our office. Adella was always the first to arrive and the last to leave. Evelina, our authentic witch from the woods of western Ukraine, came to the office only twice a week, usually on Fridays and Saturdays. She had a big dark office, decorated with a human skeleton, black candles, a crystal ball, and a large Orthodox icon. Most of her clients were women with love misfortunes. Some asked her to find them a man; others asked for help keeping the one they'd already found. One woman asked for help getting back the husband who had beaten her unconscious and run off. The men who came to see Evelina looked down on her female clients. They were serious and pragmatic, and couldn't care less about the problems of the heart; they paid Evelina to help them with their businesses. They'd ask her to come and bless their new office space, or put an evil eye on the competition, or get rid of the evil eye that somebody else (or possibly Evelina herself) had put on them.

Adella told me that Solomon had found Evelina in a Russian deli. He was buying some sliced salami from her, and he caught her messing with the scales. When he asked her to stop, she gave him a stare of such unabashed hatred that he knew right away she was a witch. "So she is not really a witch?" I asked. "Have you ever looked her in the eye?" Adella shot back.



Most of Solomon's clients were men, who complained about spinal disorders when they called. "Spine disorders—right!" Adella would say after she'd hung up the phone. These men seemed shy and compliant, but working with them must have been far from pleasant. I noticed that Solomon would get increasingly weary and irritable by the end of the day. He spoke to Adella curtly, and cringed whenever Evelina or one of her clients passed by him. When I came to the office for my afternoon classes, I often found him standing on the porch, leaning over the railing, his jacket clinging listlessly to his back. Sometimes he looked up at me, and there was a flicker of warmth and understanding in his expression.

"There is this witch," I'd tell Vadim when he came home from work. "She works with Orthodox icons and black candles. Uses both God and the Devil!" Now I was the one who dominated dinner conversations. I was the one whose food grew cold on its plate, while Vadim worked steadily on his. I talked about the nannies and their vile employers, and about Marina, whose eyes filled with tears when she watched "Pretty Woman," and about Marina's husband, who laughed like a happy baby whenever a T. rex ate somebody in "Jurassic Park." I'd talk and talk and inevitably end up talking about Solomon, Solomon's office and Solomon's movie posters, Solomon's plastic penises and Solomon's patients. I noticed that Vadim was getting tense—I was aware of his disapproving smirks—but I simply couldn't stop talking.

"This Solomon," Vadim said once. "He doesn't have a medical license, does he? He's kind of a crook, isn't he?"

"He helps people," I snapped. "What do you do all day?"

I didn't really understand Solomon's work, though I had certainly heard of alternative medicine before. Making fun of the holistic-medicine ads in *Our Brooklyn* was one of the few remaining pleasures that united me and Vadim. There were three full pages of such ads. If even half of the healers were for real, the air over Brooklyn would have been crackling with the concentration of psychic energy. I'd always imagined that a true healer would be somebody modest and quiet, somebody who'd never put a poster of himself up on the wall, or advertise in *Our Brooklyn*. But Solomon—I believed that he was for real. People came out of his office looking relieved, reassured, relaxed. And to see a new immigrant without that awful look of tension on his face was a true miracle.

I asked Adella if Solomon had been a doctor in Russia. "No, no, he used to teach journalism," she said. "When he first came here, he tried to apply for a job at Columbia, but they all laughed at him." Adella knew this from Solomon's wife, who worked as a business analyst for a big corporation. I felt a jolt of pain when I pictured Solomon making his way across the crowded Columbia campus in that same badly fitting tweed jacket, looking as glum as he did when he took a break from his patients on the porch.

One night, as I was getting ready to leave, Solomon walked into my room. He pulled up a chair next to mine, sat down, and pressed the Play button on the VCR. We watched the end of "Pretty Woman" in silence. Adella, Evelina, and all the patients had already left, and it was strangely quiet in the office, and strangely cold. I tried to keep myself from shivering as I listened to Solomon's breathing over the soundtrack of the movie. When the credits started to roll, Solomon asked if I liked the movie. I said that I liked it very much, only I couldn't understand one thing.

"What thing?" he asked.

"Why must this guy be so rich? Isn't it good enough for her to find love? Why should the guy be a millionaire?"

"A billionaire. The guy's a billionaire."

Solomon turned the VCR off and took my hands in his. His hands were cold, like mine. He asked me if I liked it in the U.S. I told him how much I'd loved it at first. I told him about my trips to Manhattan with Vadim when we first arrived. He smiled and squeezed my fingers. My hands were slowly getting warmer. I told him why I had stopped going to Manhattan, how I feared that people on the streets would laugh at me, and I told him about the glass screen. Then I felt a lump in my throat and stopped talking.

"Uh-huh," he said. "So you feel that Manhattan is closed to you?"

I nodded.

"You're right," he said. "It is closed. But you know what would open it?"

The expression on his face hardened, and I worried that our brittle new intimacy was already gone. I waited for him to start spinning some optimistic lies about how confidence and pride could open the world for anyone. But he reached into his pocket instead, and pulled out a wad of twenty-dollar bills.

"This," he said. "This is what would

open it." He shuffled the bills in his hand and put them back in his pocket.

"You're a good girl, Genya. Now go. Go home."

I picked up my bag and moved unsteadily toward the door.

"Wait!" he said. "Wait, wait, wait."

I stopped. He walked up to me, put his arms around me, and pulled me close. We stood like this for a very long time, until it felt as if each millimetre of my body were being enveloped by his. His lips brushed my hair. He inhaled and moaned, "You smell like pickled apples."

Then he moved away from me.

"Now go, Genya. Go."

Outside, my legs were weak. I lowered myself onto the stone steps of the porch and sat there for some time, hugging my knees. I was shaken, scared, grateful, disappointed, relieved, but mostly happy, insanely happy. The whole way back home on the subway, I was smiling and chuckling and muttering random silly lines from "Pretty Woman": "You work on commissions, right? Big mistake. Big. Huge. I have to go shopping now."

After I'd been teaching for three months, two nannies from my class, Nadia and Svetlana, found jobs with American families. They pooled their money and bought me a dozen roses and a small bottle of perfume. "They are giving me my own room," Nadia told the other nannies. "And guess what else! My own bathroom! I've never had my own private bathroom in my life!" One of the nannies asked Svetlana if she had her own bathroom, too. She shook her head and smiled. "It's still very nice," she said. "I have a big bed, a nightstand, and a beautiful lamp." The nannies laughed and chatted, and soon became so loud that Solomon looked in to see what the commotion was about. "This is a great success, girls," he said. "A real victory. We have to run an article in *Our Brooklyn*." He brought a Polaroid camera from his office and asked me, Nadia, and Svetlana to pose next to the VCR stand. "Genya, you have to be in the middle," he said. "Sveta, you're a big girl, stoop a little. Yeah, just like that. Genya, raise your flowers to your chest. . . . A little higher. Perfect!" Solomon and I hadn't really spoken since the night we'd watched "Pretty Woman" together, and I wondered if the memory of that encounter haunted him the way it haunted me. I wanted to believe that it did. "You look lovely, Genya," he said, examining the Polaroid. "The essence of hopeful innocence." I blushed.

When the article came out, Solomon asked Adella to frame it and put it up on the wall. The article praised my teaching methods, and, reading it, I couldn't help admiring them, too. The author described how I'd come up with the idea of showing videos at my very first lesson and how I'd managed to develop them into a gracefully coherent system. He stressed how incredible this was, that at only twenty-two I had accomplished something that had escaped all other language teachers: I had created a method that made learning effortless and fun.

This was a great, great success, I told myself, and definitely the first of many achievements. I thought about how I could expand my method to teach immigrants from other places, too. I would have students from all over the country. I would publish a book. No, I would publish a series of books. I would create educational videos. I would be making as much money as Vadim. I would be making more money than Vadim. I would be making more money than Vadim and his friends combined. My fantasies went so far that I actually wondered how to acquire the legal rights to use scenes from the movies in my own videos.

"This is a paid advertisement," Vadim said, when he saw the article. "A paid advertisement! In *Our Brooklyn!*"

I told him that I hated him.

So what if it is a paid advertisement, I'd say to myself every time I saw the framed article in the waiting room. Everything in it is true. But, the more time passed, the less enthusiastic I felt. For one thing, my classes weren't bringing in enough money. The article in *Our Brooklyn* attracted a few new people, but, with several of my old students leaving, the total soon dwindled. After Marina succeeded in persuading the manager of Lord & Taylor to give her a full refund for some well-worn clothes, she told me that she had all the English she needed. Her husband dropped out after I refused

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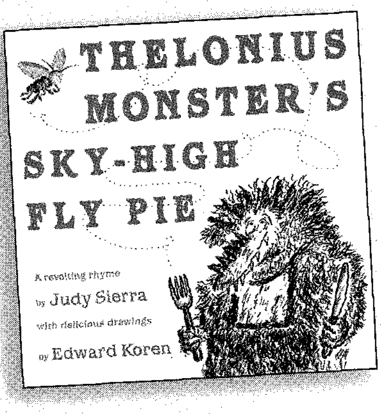
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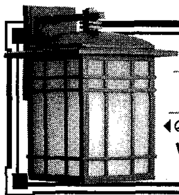

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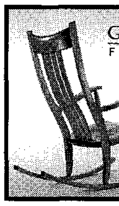

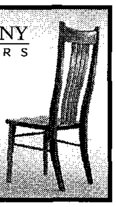

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to spend a weekend in Atlantic City with him. A couple of students left because they didn't like my thick Russian accent. Others left because they weren't satisfied with my knowledge of English grammar. Two women complained that I charged too much. I told them that Solomon set the prices and I couldn't do anything about it. They offered to pay a couple of bucks on top of what he paid me if I'd come to their place. I accepted, because I was scared to lose them, too.

THE ETHER

The room is ether-bright,
rigid,

adrift in words

or I am

an afterthought,
refusing to dissolve.

Nothing

to be taken away;
to be added.

——

What can words say?

Chaplain service at the checkout;

a desire
to be credible
across the straight.

A man and woman
finish sentences
and laugh.

Each sentence is both
an aquiescence
and a dismissal.

—*Rae Armantrout*

Every time Adella counted the profits from my classes, she let out a very audible sigh. Once, I overheard her complaining to Solomon that the income was hardly enough to cover the expense. "I don't see the point of continuing with her classes," she said. He argued that I brought in new people who could use the other services. "Look in the book," he said. "Ten of her students bought the tea." Solomon had recently hung another poster in the lobby, advertising a miraculous new tea he was selling. The poster claimed that the tea cleansed the body of every harmful chemical substance it had ingested and promised relief within days. Boxes of the tea lay everywhere in the office—in Solomon's room, on Adella's counter, on Evelina's desk next to her crystal ball, on the chairs in the waiting room, on the windowsills, and on the VCR stand in my room. The office worked as a team. Solomon always asked his patients if they wanted to learn better English; Evelina the Witch always directed her ailing clients to Solomon; I was expected to praise Evelina; and everybody was expected to sell the tea. I didn't push the tea, but I didn't dissuade my students from buying it, either. I didn't say anything even after I heard that more and more patients were complaining that the tea had brought them nothing but diarrhea. "How else did you expect to be cleansed?" Adella retorted.

Other aspects of my work began to trouble me. Nadia sometimes dropped by to see her friends in my class. They all asked about her new job, but she didn't gush anymore. She shrugged, or mumbled something, and always tried to change the subject. Only once did I hear her talk about her employers: "The mother said to her son the other day, 'Honey, you need to work on your math a little harder. You don't want to end up like Nadia, do you?' " Another nanny patted Nadia on the arm and said, "Hey! You know more math than those fuckers ever will!" Nadia gave me a quick wary look. I knew this look. I caught it from time to time when the nannies complained about their employers in my presence. I knew that, no matter how much friendship and gratitude they professed, for them I would always belong to the same category as their employers, to the category of spoiled, arrogant women, whose life was a dream, whose work was a joke compared with theirs. I had a green card. I had a husband who made enough money. I didn't have to live at other people's homes, or watch other people's children, or sleep on the floor, or scrub toilets and be lectured for not scrubbing them well enough. There had been a hint of contempt in Nadia's manner when she put that perfume bottle on my desk, a hint of resentment. I'd told her that I couldn't accept it, but she'd insisted. "Take it, take it," she said. "Teaching is work, too."

The company that distributed the tea sent us a new batch of posters, and Solomon spent the better part of one morning hanging them. Eventually, he decided that two would go on the left and right walls of the lobby, one above Adella's desk, and the rest in our rooms. He asked me to help. I held a poster up, my palms pressed against its shiny surface, while Solomon happily pushed in tacks. The tea business was going well, and I had noticed lately that Solomon was looking less glum than before. "One thing cardboard walls are good for is holding tacks," he said, and winked at me from under the curling edge of the poster. We stood side by side, so close to each other that the folds of his jacket brushed against my hip. I marvelled at how little his proximity excited me. When I thought back to our movie night now, it was the image of his money that came up. Everything else—the pressure of his hands on my back, the feel of his lips brushing my hair, his line about pickled apples—had faded away, while that wad of crumpled, sweaty bills stayed clear in my mind.

"It's a beauty," Solomon said, stepping away from the poster, which showed a steaming teacup with the word "cancer" dissolving above it in a bluish-white plume of vapor. "I'll use it for a two-page ad in *Our Brooklyn* next week."

"Cancer?" Evelina asked, peeking into the room.

"You don't understand, Evelina," Solomon said. "We're not selling a cure. We're selling hope. Hope is priceless."

"If it's priceless, why do we charge for it?" she asked. She tore the poster off the wall of her office and threw it into the garbage.

Vadim and I still walked to the train together on Monday mornings, and Vadim still waved to me from the opposite platform, but some days I could barely make myself wave back. I noticed something that I hadn't noticed before. In the morning hours, there were just one or two people waiting on my side of the station. Almost all the commuters stood on the other side, with Vadim. They were going up the line, into the city, to work at real jobs. I was going down the line, to sell the Cinderella dream and a laxative hyped as a magic potion. More than once, I thought I saw something like pity in Vadim's expression.

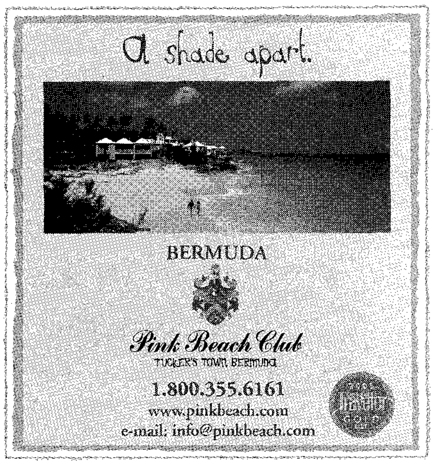
Every Monday, I fantasized about quitting. I imagined myself tearing down the tea poster, like Evelina, then marching into Solomon's office and telling him that he was a liar and a crook, that he disgusted me. But, as the week progressed, I'd remember those horrible days I'd spent with the Help Wanted section, and my resolve would fade.

One Tuesday in early March, Adella called me at home and asked me to come to the office, even though I didn't have a class that day.

"Go, go—he's waiting for you," she said, pointing to Solomon's room when I arrived.

Solomon was standing by his desk, staring down, his fingers rubbing his temples. "Close the door!" he commanded in a grating voice. I closed the door. "I saw one of your students today," he said, without looking up. "She told me that you have been teaching her at her home. Behind my back!" He made a sharp movement and knocked over one of the penises. I instinctively picked it up. "You came here with your fake diploma, but I trusted you. I gave you a chance, didn't I? I took you on and I paid for that bullshit article about you. And still you felt that you could steal from me? Just like that?" His left eye was twitching. He looked old and genuinely hurt. He slumped into his chair and shook his head. It was then that I realized I was still holding a sticky, gummy penis in my hand. I put it back on the desk and walked to the door. "You're a liar and a thief! You disgust me!" he yelled at my back. When I came out, Adella reached under her desk and pushed a box full of my videos toward me without a word.

It was raining, and the bottom of the box gave out halfway to the subway. I gathered up the videos and carried them in a messy pile in my arms. "Pretty Woman." "Working Girl." "Once Upon a Time in America." The videos on top of the stack kept sliding off, and I had to crouch and retrieve them with one shaking hand while cradling the rest with my other arm. For some reason, it was this activity—crouching, cradling, and picking the videos up off the wet asphalt—that really made me feel like a liar and a thief. I was almost at the subway when it occurred to me that I didn't have to carry them at all. I put the videos down, in three neat stacks by a pile of discarded furniture on the sidewalk, and walked away. ♦



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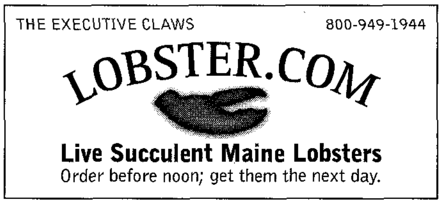

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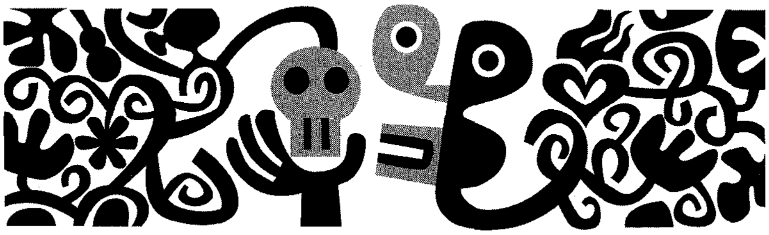


BOOKS

90% HATEFUL

A new novel by the provocative Michel Houellebecq.

BY JOHN UPDIKE

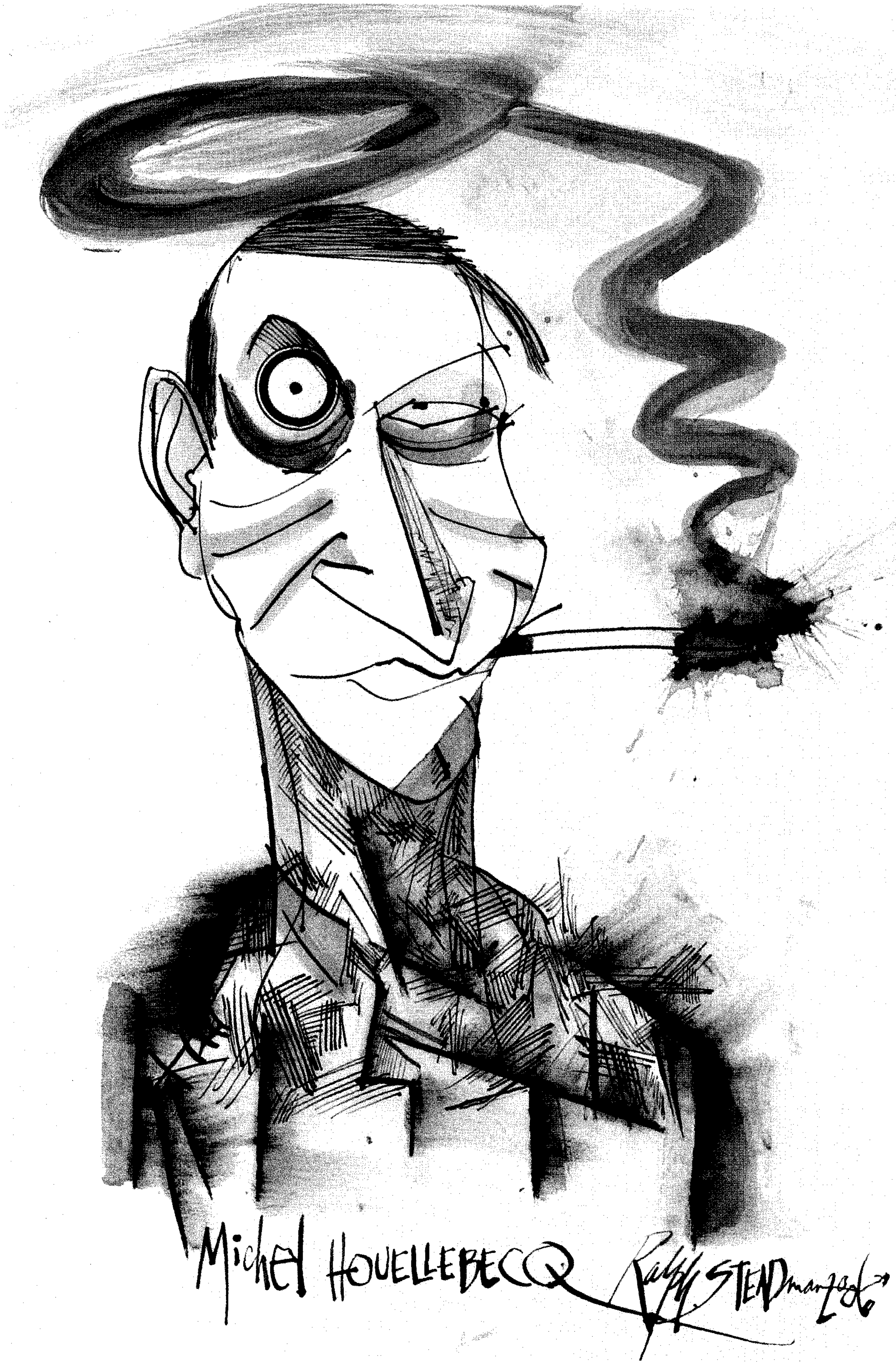
It is to the credit of the French novelist, poet, and provocateur Michel Houellebecq that, in his new novel, "The Possibility of an Island" (translated from the French by Gavin Bowd; Knopf; $24.95), he so boldly, with considerable energy and erudition, seeks to confront and encompass the fundamentals of the human condition—or, to quote his veiled reference to André Malraux, "what a pompous author of the twentieth century had felt fit to call 'the human condition.'" It is to Houellebecq's discredit, or at least to his novel's disadvantage, that his thoroughgoing contempt for, and strident impatience with, humanity in its traditional occupations and sentiments prevents him from creating characters whose conflicts and aspirations the reader can care about. The usual Houellebecq hero, whose monopoly on self-expression sucks up most of the narrative's oxygen, presents himself in one of two guises: a desolate loner consumed by boredom and apathy, or a galvanized male porn star. In neither role does he ask for, nor does he receive, much sympathy.

Michel, the protagonist of Houellebecq's previous novel, "Platform"—the rather bleak and enigmatic English rendering of "Plateforme: Au Milieu du Monde," possibly an allusion to global politics, or a pun on "flat style," a characterization that most French critics find apt—helps promote, in conjunction with the ideally compliant and lewd travel agent Valérie, a momentarily booming chain of Asian vacation resorts for European sex tourists. In the new novel, a lengthy exercise in futuristic science fiction, the hero, named Daniel, involves himself in the founding stages of a worldwide cult, Elohimism, that delivers its adherents into practical immortality, achieved through replacement of the deceased individual by a DNA-derived duplicate possessed of not only the same bodily traits but the same memories. The original Daniel—Daniel1—lives more or less in the present era, in Paris and Andalusia, and his latest edition, Daniel25, lives two millennia hence, in a depopulated Spain. They and the intervening Daniels have become, thanks to the ingenious founders of Elohimism, what the novel calls neohumans, who reside in electrically fenced isolation, keeping in rather slack electronic touch with one another and waiting, with an indifference compounded of Buddhist detachment and genetic modification, to die and be replaced by eighteen-year-old clones. The earth in these millennia has been beset by several disasters: first, a melting of the polar ice that reduced the planet's population from fourteen billion to seven hundred million, and then the Great Drying Up, which reduced it further, to pathetic bands of savages who roam the blasted terrain outside the fenced pens of the neohumans, and who are killed if they come too close, as beseeching mothers with starving babies sometimes do. Daniel24 annihilates them with "the sensation of accomplishing a necessary and legitimate act."

Sound inviting? Want to go there? Curiously, of the novel's strictly alternating strands, the relatively laconic and sexually neutered commentary of the neohumans Daniel24 and 25 is the more interesting—more pregnant with suspense, more amusing to imagine in its technology and austerity, its attenuated eschatology. The far fuller autobiography of Daniel1, detailing Daniel's involvement with his wife, Isabelle, and a midlife mistress, Esther, and relating his halfhearted participation in the hectic founding of the eventually triumphant Elohimite sect, seems by comparison an opinionated drone, an interminable blog from nowhere. Much of the fantasy feels warmed-over: the Canary Islands setting of the headquarters of the fledgling sect's leader suggests the opulent, fortified lair of a James Bond villain, and Daniel's two inamoratas, a loving wife who dislikes sex and a sexy twenty-two-year-old Spanish blonde who doesn't love him, both have the airbrushed unreality of Playmates-of-the-Month. In fact, "The Possibility of an Island" has been excerpted by *Playboy;* Houellebecq and Hugh Hefner alike offer the ailing world a panacea of self-righteous hedonism. The twinkle in Hefner's eye becomes a furious glare in Houellebecq's. Their connoisseur's emphasis on the physical perfection of the naked young women whom they present as pieces of Utopia verges on pedophilia; Daniel1 writes, "The dream of all men is to meet little sluts who are innocent but ready for all forms of depravity—which is what, more or less, all teenage girls are." Houellebecq's spokesmen insist that sex is not merely an aspect of life, or merely one of its pleasures: "All energy is of a sexual nature, not mainly, but exclusively, and when the animal is no longer good for reproducing, it is absolutely no longer good for anything." Of the beloved Esther we are assured:

> Like all very pretty young girls she was basically only good for fucking, and it would have been stupid to employ her for anything else, to see her as anything other than a lux-

The typical Houellebecq hero is a desolate loner consumed by boredom and apathy, or a galvanized male porn star.


Michel HOUELLEBECQ
Ralph STEADman mar 2006

RALPH STEADMAN

> ury animal, pampered and spoiled, protected from all cares as from any difficult or painful task so as to be better able to devote herself to her exclusively sexual service.

Houellebecq's solemnly blunt descriptions of sex acts are notorious, or as notorious as such things can be in a sex-saturated age; but it is one thing to propagandize for sex and another to integrate it, as more than "naughty bits," into the conflict-ridden flow of incident and psychology that make up a novel. The reader has no trouble believing that Daniel1, over forty and physically no prize, sorely grieves when his pet slut Esther in her heedless youth tires of him; it is another thing for the reader to grieve along with him. This reader, actually, rejoiced when the breakup came, and wondered why Esther had been so slow about it.

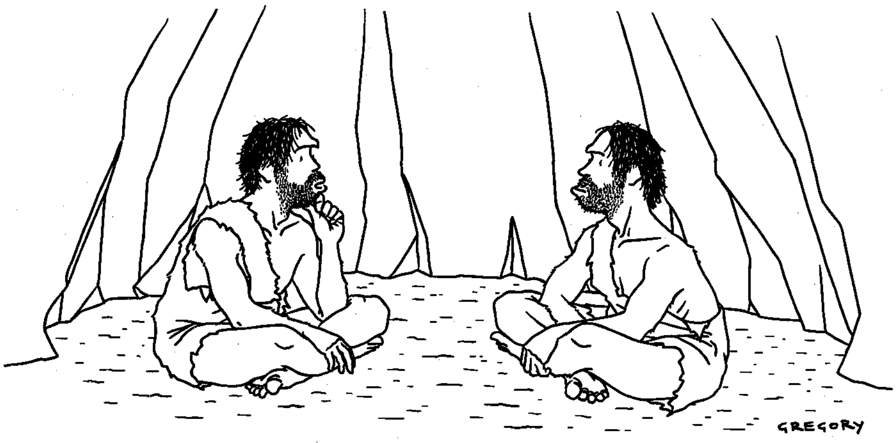
Houellebecq does not attempt to portray his hero and his views as agreeable. Daniel1 made his fame and his fortune—forty-two million euros and growing—as a deliberately outrageous standup comedian and video artist, one of whose presentations is subtitled "100% Hateful." Muslims and children are especially loathed targets. "The show *We Prefer the Palestinian Orgy Sluts* was undoubtedly the pinnacle of my career—from a media point of view, I mean," Daniel1 says, in a hard-to-miss allusion to the furor caused by the anti-Muslim views expressed in "Platform," and by Houellebecq's subsequent, unrepentant appearances in court and on television. Daniel1 produces a parody of a porn film titled "Munch on My Gaza Strip (My Huge Jewish Settler)," and a prospective script called "The Social Security Deficit" is summarized:

> The first fifteen minutes of the film consisted of the unremitting explosion of babies' skulls under the impact of shots from a high-caliber revolver—I had envisaged it in slow motion, then with slight accelerations—anyway, a whole choreography of brains, in the style of John Woo.

The film goes on to expose "the existence of a network of child killers, brilliantly organized and inspired by ideas rooted in Deep Ecology. The MED (Movement for the Extermination of Dwarves) called for the disappearance of the human race, which it judged irredeemably harmful to the balance of the biosphere." Tree huggers, get your guns. Daniel admits to "that legitimate disgust that seizes any normal man at the sight of a baby," and to a "solid conviction that a child is a sort of vicious dwarf, innately cruel, who combines the worst features of the species, and from whom domestic pets keep a wise distance." The despiser of dwarves doesn't love giants, either, at least literary ones: Shakespeare is a "sad fool," James Joyce "an insane Irishman" who wrote "ponderous prose," and Vladimir Nabokov a "mediocre and mannered pseudo-poet" whose style resembles a "collapsed pastry." Writers who get passing marks, sometimes grudgingly, are Balzac, Marcel Proust, Agatha Christie, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Heinrich von Kleist.

Daniel is not entirely hateful. He loves his dog, Fox, who, through all his own replications, is not only wholly affectionate but *happy:* "We sleep together, and every morning is a festival of licks and scratches from his little paws; it is an obvious joy for him to be reunited with life and daylight." The human difficulty in attaining and sustaining canine happiness arouses an emotion close to pity, described as "a horror, an authentic horror at the unending calvary that is man's existence." Nor is Houellebecq, shrill and even silly as he can be, entirely without literary virtue. His four novels—"Whatever" (1994), "The Elementary Particles" (1998), and "Platform" (2001) are the three others—display a grasp of science and mathematics beyond that of all but a few non-genre novelists. He is anthropologically alert to the deeper trends behind contemporary news, fashion, and mores; his macabre future takes off from such recent news items as the consensual cannibalism of two German men and the deaths of hundreds of neglected French elderly in a heat wave. His elaborate invention, in the latest novel, of a new religion stands on a base of present cultural facts: "Elohimism marched in many respects behind consumer capitalism—which, turning youth into the supremely desirable commodity, had little by little destroyed respect for tradition and the cult of the ancestors—inasmuch as it promised the indefinite preservation of this same youth, and the pleasures associated with it." His sociological/psychological/philosophical vocabulary opaquely thickens around his core topic—Pascal's, after all, and La Rochefoucauld's—of human isolation and unhappiness:

> The subject-object separation is triggered, in the course of cognitive processes, by a convergent mesh of failures. . . . It is in failure, and through failure, that the subject constitutes itself, and the passage of humans to neohumans, with the disappearance of all physical contact that is its correlative, has in no way modified this basic ontological given. . . . It has, however, been shown countless times that the physical pain that accompanied the existence of humans was consubstantial with them, that it was the direct consequence of an inadequate organization of their nervous system, just as their inability to establish interindividual relations in a mode other than that of confrontation resulted from a relative insufficiency of their social instincts in relation to the complexity of the societies that their intellectual means enabled them to found.



"Something's just not right—our air is clean, our water is pure, we all get plenty of exercise, everything we eat is organic and free-range, and yet nobody lives past thirty."

Houellebecq's most ambitious scientific reach is to be found in "The Elementary Particles," one of whose two main characters, the biologist Michel Djerzinski, is introduced as among the “most clear-sighted and deliberate engineers” of the third “paradigm shift, which opened up a new era in world history”—the other shifts being the fall of the Roman Empire to Christianity and the post-medieval fall of Christianity to modern science. Djerzinski and his half brother Bruno Clément split the customary Houellebecq protagonist in two: Michel (that name again!) is the near-autistic container of affective emptiness, while Bruno does duty, after some clumsy auditions, as the porn star. Their intertwined tale, which toward its end sings praises of the intricate Book of Kells, is knotty with words like “pubococcygeal,” sentences like “According to Margenau’s theory, human consciousness could be compared to a field of probabilities in a Fock space, defined as a direct sum of Hilbert spaces,” and pages of tendentious analogy between quantum physics and biological processes. Djerzinski’s theories end in the creation, as soon as the year 2029, of a race of new, immortal, nonviolent, sex-free, egoless beings, of whom the ostensible author is, to our surprise, one; he graciously dedicates his book to obsolete mankind. The paradigm-shift scenario approximates that of “The Possibility of an Island,” which, being more schematic and dogmatic, is the inferior novel.

But Houellebecq’s best novel, the only one that is less idea-driven than experience-driven, is the first, a brief first-person narrative so shapeless and various that its English translator derived the title “Whatever” from the French “Extension du Domaine de la Lutte” (“Extension of the Field of the Struggle”). Composed in short and jumpy chapters akin in tone to the amiable absurdism of Raymond Queneau and Robert Pinget, the novel begins like a Gallic version of Kingsley Amis’s “Lucky Jim” or Jay McInerney’s “Bright Lights, Big City”—an account of a young goof-off’s embarrassments with liquor, women, and gainful employment. The unnamed narrator is, he tells us, an “analyst-programmer in a computer software company” with a salary “two and a half times the minimum wage.” Houellebecq, after studying at the National Institute of Agronomy, spent eleven years debugging computers for the French government; he differs from most contemporary romancers in his acquaintance with office work, its applied technology and edgy relationships. His two most recent novels take an organization man’s delight in diagramming the organization of, respectively, a more overtly sexual kind of Club Med and a clone-based global cult. The diffident but apparently competent software expert of “Whatever” addresses some specifically aesthetic questions: “The progressive effacement of human relationships is not without certain problems for the novel. . . . The novel form is not conceived for depicting indifference or nothingness; a flatter, more terse and dreary discourse would need to be invented.” As he warms up, he formulates a distinctly Houellebecqian, furtively puritanical world view:

> Love as a kind of innocence and as a capacity for illusion, as an aptitude for epitomizing the whole of the other sex in a single loved being rarely resists a year of sexual immorality, and never two. In reality the successive sexual experiences accumulated during adolescence undermine and rapidly destroy all possibility of projection of an emotional and romantic sort; progressively, and in fact extremely quickly, one becomes as capable of love as an old slag. And so one leads, obviously, a slag’s life; in ageing one becomes less seductive, and on that account bitter. One is jealous of the young, and so one hates them. Condemned to remain unavowable, this hatred festers and becomes increasingly fervent; then it dies down and fades away, just as everything fades away. All that remains is resentment and disgust, sickness and the anticipation of death.

These stately pessimistic reflections, however, are overlaid with a personal development: in the wake of a professional colleague’s sudden death in an auto accident, and under the strain of erotic frustration and alcohol, cigarette, and sedative abuse, the hero of “Whatever” suffers a breakdown; he abandons his job, consults a psychiatrist, and enters a hospital. A female psychologist takes him to task for “speaking in general, overly sociological terms”; he responds with the generalization that “this notion of ageing and death is insupportable for the individual human being,” and invites her to sleep with him—the only palliative in sight. She prudently replaces her therapeutic presence with that of a male colleague, and he is eventually released: “I left the clinic on 26th of May; I recall the sunshine, the heat, the atmosphere of freedom in the streets. It was unbearable.” The hero of Albert Camus’s “The Stranger,” a classic repeatedly echoed in Houellebecq’s œuvre,

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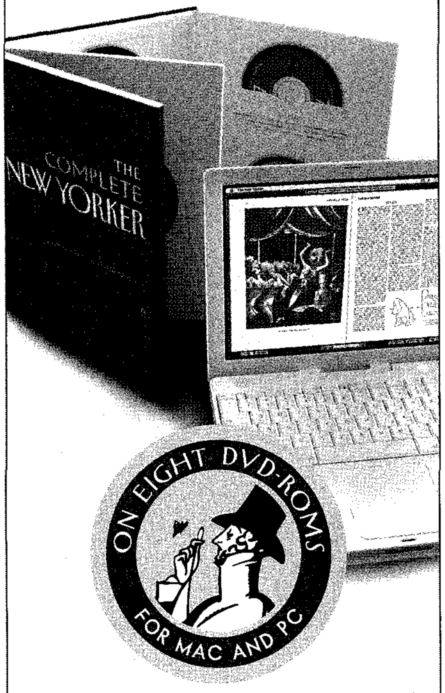

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found the harsh sun on an African beach unbearable; even the temperate French sun afflicts the tender mental skin of a stranger sixty years later. He cries a lot, and has volatile sensations, at one moment feeling, "with impressive violence, the possibility of joy," and at another sensing "my skin again as a frontier, and the external world as a crushing weight." Yet a recognizable everyday reality exists in "Whatever," which is populated by characters who are not all either odious dolts or slavish sex toys. We experience the hero's effort to rise into happiness ("It's not that I feel tremendously low; it's rather that the world around me appears high") as poignantly sincere, and his estrangement as a personal aberration rather than the universe's fault. Hereafter, in his novels, Houellebecq's will to generalize smothers the real world under a blanket condemnation, and his determination to invent a more congenial one grows.

In an epilogue of less than forty pages, "The Possibility of an Island" arrives at a tranquillized beauty that has some relation to the concluding escape and convalescence of "Whatever." Troubled by the departure of an e-mail communicant, Marie23, from her haven in New York City, Daniel25, as he is now numbered, puts on a light backpack and, with his beloved Fox, abandons his fenced individual preserve and his guaranteed immortality. He has only a vague plan: to walk southwest across the land that had been Spain to the Canary Island of Lanzarote, where Elohimism started. Conveniently, the cult's scientific founders redesigned the neohuman body to survive on water, solar energy, and a small intake of mineral salts, eliminating the need to eat and to defecate. Fox, rapidly adjusting to the wild, catches rabbits and other small prey as master and dog traverse the bleak topography. Daniel25 in his improved body can walk for twenty hours at a time, and the human savages are more afraid of him than he of them. Houellebecq's idealization of sexual congress comes to a Swiftian halt when the timorous savages offer Daniel, as to a god, a human sacrifice, a terrified young female who opens her legs to him. Aware of "the procedures of human sexuality," though after two millennia of chastity the knowledge has become purely theoretical, the neohuman starts to oblige but is "overwhelmed by the pestilential odor that emanated from between her thighs . . . a mixture of the musty smell of shit and rotten fish." Rebuffed, she crawls toward him to commit fellatio—the gold standard of Houellebecq's erotic currency—but her mouth also stinks, and her teeth are rotten and black, and the neohuman "gently" sends her back untouched to her tribe.

Growing fainter, his faithful Fox slain with a bow and arrow by the unreconstructed human beings, Daniel25 staggers across a featureless, ashy tract called the Great Gray Space, and reaches, two days after his supply of mineral salts has run out, "a string of puddles and ponds of almost still water" where once there had been ocean. The salty water revives his body, and he prepares for a, by his estimate, sixty-year delay before death and irreversible dissolution claim him. He has twenty thousand identical days to live through: "I would avoid thought in the same way I would avoid suffering." In "The Elementary Particles," it is said of Michel Djerzinski that "he'd always had a tendency to confuse happiness with coma." The love of his life, as she lies dying, "seemed to him completely happy." A fulfilled death wish may be the best, all orgies past, that Houellebecq can provide. Daniel1, the performer of hateful sketches, boasts of being told by a friend:

> On the intellectual level I was in reality slightly above average, and on the moral level I was the same as everyone else: a bit sentimental, a bit cynical, like most men. I was just very honest, and therein lay my distinction; I was, in relation to the current norms of mankind, almost unbelievably honest.

But how honest, really, is a world picture that excludes the pleasures of parenting, the comforts of communal belonging, the exercise of daily curiosity, and the widely met moral responsibility to make the best of each stage of life, including the last? The island possible to this airless, oppressive imagination has too few resources. The final edition of Daniel has sunk to the condition of a mollusk: "I bathed for a long time under the sun and the starlight, and I felt nothing other than a slightly obscure and nutritive sensation." The sensations that Houellebecq gives us are not nutritive. ♦

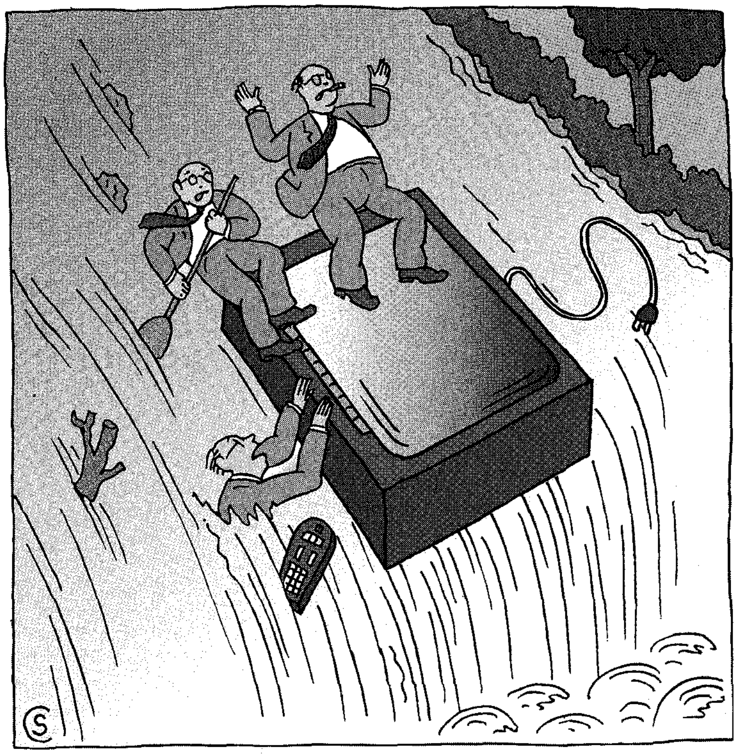
BOOKS

DON'T TOUCH THAT DIAL

Network TV and the prime-time wars.

BY TAD FRIEND

The past dozen years have been the most convulsive in television history. The four major networks' share of the viewing audience has fallen from seventy-two per cent to forty-six. As the HBO hits "The Sopranos" and "Deadwood" made even the best network shows look strangely antique, basic-cable offerings like "South Park" (on Comedy Central) and "The Shield" (on FX) fattened their channels' purses through subscription fees as well as through ads. Even Univision's *telenovela* "Alborada" began to outdraw some network shows. Scrambling to keep up, the networks began premièring shows throughout the year, rather than just in the fall; running them for "short arcs" of only ten or twelve episodes; and putting on serial dramas and reality shows, which can't profitably be aired in repeats. These changes meant that the networks were often abandoning their expectation of vast profits from the "back end"—the sale of a hit show into syndication—although they began to recoup by selling DVDs of shows like "24" and "The Office."



Competing with one another, the networks lose sight of the real threats.

SEYMOUR CHWAST

The biggest development was that the "linear" viewing model—in which people watched "Lost" when it aired, Wednesdays at 9 P.M. on ABC—started to give way to the "on-demand" model, in which people watched "Lost" whenever and wherever they wanted to: on TiVo systems, iPods, or P.C.s, which swiftly routed them to an illegal P2P download, or to abc.com (which began streaming episodes a few weeks ago), or to a montage of the show's best scenes on YouTube, a video bazaar where viewers were likely to forget about "Lost" altogether as they watched grass-roots "content"—skateboard wipeouts, say, created by "sk8hed," from Bakersfield. Because on-demand viewers often zap commercials, the networks ramped up product placements, choreographing Paula Abdul's every sip from her red Coca-Cola glass, on "American Idol." In one week last month, Shedd's Country Crock meals were woven into network story lines, with varying degrees of seamlessness, a hundred and forty-two times.

In the aptly titled "Desperate Networks" (Doubleday; $26.95), Bill Carter takes a microscope to this tumultuous period—and notices almost none of these developments. He gives us three perfunctory paragraphs about on-demand technologies, a sentence or two on basic cable's dual revenue stream, and a couple of passing mentions of HBO. So how does Carter, who covers television for the *Times*, fill his three-hundred-and-eighty-nine-page book? The same way Kenneth Starr filled his four-hundred-and-forty-five-page report on President Clinton: he latches onto an iffy premise and worries it like a terrier. Carter's premise, and the prevailing wisdom at the networks, is that television is a business of hits, and that the great majority of shows don't matter. By way of illustration, he reports that in 1997 NBC, which garnered more than forty per cent of its revenues from its "Must See TV" Thursday lineup, offered Jerry Seinfeld a hundred and ten million dollars to continue "Seinfeld" for one more year. (The comedian, who already had a hundred and ten million dollars, said no.)

Carter is tenacious and well connected; as in "The Late Shift," his compelling 1994 account of the struggle within NBC over who would host the "Tonight Show," he has been able to retrieve minute-by-minute recollections of the people who made the big decisions. But though he is sure-footed when navigating the worlds of late-night and news programming, he loses his bearings in prime time. We're treated to three pages on the competition between "The Chamber" and "The Chair"—both of which were quickly cancelled—and two more on how Taheed and Ytossie got kicked off "Temptation Island." In the Venn diagram of people who will read this book, people who know who Taheed and Ytossie are, and people who actually care, the overlap is a null set.

The larger problem is that Carter tells his story as if it were still 1966, before cable or the Internet. Nowadays, network executives are as likely to be plotting to extract "retransmission consent" fees from cable operators as they are to be gathering around their magnetic scheduling boards and shifting shows from slot to slot. Yet the one-upping stories they tell Carter suggest that they still see ratings as a zero-sum game. By obsessing about whether "Chicago Hope" will beat "ER," the execs are making a classic *Time* vs. *Newsweek* or Holmes vs. Moriarty mistake: grappling with their longtime rival, oblivious of their surroundings, they all fall over the cliff together. And they take Carter with them. One of his pivotal scenes comes in September of 2000, when a CBS scheduler named Kelly Kahl slaps the network's hit show "Survivor" on the board for Thursday at 8 P.M.—opposite "Friends." As his colleagues screech, Kahl delivers a sermon right out of a TV drama, declaring, "If you've got the golden hammer, you've got to use it. For profitability, to make any kind of inroads on NBC, to be a real player, to be a real network, we have to do this."

The book details how Jeff Zucker, newly installed as NBC's president of entertainment, responded to CBS's golden hammer by "supersizing" "Friends" and his other Thursday-night comedies, stretching them to forty minutes to keep the audience from sampling "Survivor." (To Carter, this is "a brilliant counterstroke"; actually, it's an old CBS trick from 1979, when, to cripple ABC's "Mork & Mindy," on Sunday nights, the network simply let its football broadcasts run long.) Carter sees this exchange as the opening moves in the chess match between Grandmaster Zucker and Grandmaster Leslie Moonves, of CBS, with the endgame being the 2004-05 season. That's when CBS, a perennial laggard among the networks, surged ahead of the long-dominant NBC, which fell from first to last.

In his acknowledgments, Carter hails Zucker for his "meteoric career steps" and calls him "among the best stories for me to cover in the past fifteen years"; he praises Moonves, evenhandedly, for being "a dynamic executive and also one who enjoyed the give-and-take of the interview process as much as anyone I had ever dealt with." A little apple-polishing is understandable for a reporter whose day job depends upon access. More worrying are his efforts to distinguish his titans from one another, and to characterize the predicaments that each faced. Zucker is "the utterly New York professional, in a perfectly tailored suit"; Moonves is "impeccably tailored"; Robert Iger, the Disney executive who oversaw ABC, is "impeccably dressed," and his colleague Susan Lyne favors "striking ivory or pastel suits." In seeking to humanize the suits, Carter portrays them as . . . suits. And when it comes to metaphors he tends to channel-surf. He writes, "Now fingers were being pointed at Zucker—some from competitors, but others from at least nominally nonpartisan Hollywood studio and agency executives—for milking old NBC hits like 'ER' and 'Law & Order' of every drop of ratings juice left in them, and for being too clever by more than half in forestalling the day of reckoning with program stunts and gimmicks." ABC, meanwhile, "had the feel—and maybe the smell—of the chronically snakebitten." *Maybe* the smell. And at CBS "there were nits in the bowl of cherries." Yuck.

Carter begins his narrative in 1995, when Moonves takes the reins of the dead-as-a-doornail CBS, bites the bullet, and goes mano a mano into the lion's den:

> Doing something big seemed the only answer, so Moonves went after the biggest star he could think of. He wooed Bill Cosby. It was a pattern Moonves would repeat frequently, signing up stars who had had hits on NBC and ABC when they were younger. As they hit their forties or fifties, Moonves would bring them into CBS: Ted Danson, Rhea Perlman, Tom Selleck, Tim Daly, David Caruso, Amy Brenneman, Ellen DeGeneres, Jason Alexander, Jenna Elfman. The list grew every year—even though almost none of the shows worked.

There are some nits in the cherries here. Danson and Caruso ended up with successful shows at CBS; Brenneman and Elfman came to the network in their thirties, and Brenneman's "Judging Amy" was a hit. The graver difficulty is that CBS's rise was in fact built on the back of the Discovery Channel—and over Moonves's objections. The excellence of the reality-show producer Mark Burnett's "Eco-Challenge," on Discovery, persuaded a low-level CBS executive to listen to Burnett's pitch for "Survivor" and, eventually, to get a very reluctant Moonves to try the show out in the summer of 2000. And Discovery's "The New Detectives: Case Studies in Forensic Science" inspired a writer named Anthony Zuiker to create "C.S.I."—which Moonves never really liked. Now there are three versions of "C.S.I.," and they're all in the top fifteen.

You wouldn't go to network executives if you wanted to create a hit show for the same reason you wouldn't go to the chairman of Dow Chemical if you wanted to create a great perfume. Execs are inclined to imitate the most imitable aspects of recent hits. First, they buy the stars (see Moonves, above), repeatedly trotting out Jason Alexander as a noxious crank and never quite grasping that the "Seinfeld" curse has haunted every subsequent show that the sitcom's alumni have tried because stars are not shows and vice versa. ("Law & Order" has endured for sixteen seasons, with twenty different actors playing the six main roles, because viewers proved loyal to its three distinctive elements: the idea of crime followed by punishment; the strong writing; and that *dun-dun* sound.) Then the reverse engineering gets truly silly. After "My Name Is Earl" became a smash on NBC, last fall, ABC issued the eponymous disasters "Jake in Progress" and "Emily's Reasons Why Not." This spring, twelve of the eighteen sitcom pilots that ABC commissioned were filmed with a single camera rather than the usual four—just like "My Name Is Earl."

The late Brandon Tartikoff, who turned around NBC's entertainment division during the eighties, with shows like "Miami Vice," "The Cosby Show," "Cheers," and "L.A. Law," used to say, "All hits are flukes." NBC not only didn't anticipate that "Earl" would be big, Carter notes; it went out of its way to scotch the show. When the pilot fared extremely well in focus-group testing, the network, in disbelief, sent it back to be tested again and again—five times in all. None of this sits well with Carter's penchant for great-man narratives. As Carter himself observes at one point, "The plain truth was that no matter how much they spent on script development, which stars they signed to multimillion-dollar deals, how many notes they gave on story beats and character arcs, hits most often arrived on a network executive's doorstep by chance, by whim, by blind, stupid luck."

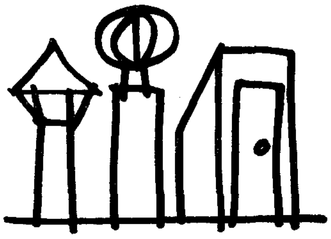
Given all this uncertainty, Carter writes, executives often take out "schmuck insurance"—they'll ask for a piece of a show if they're lending an actress or releasing a writer, just in case the project becomes a success. The "schmucks" they're insuring against, of course, are themselves, and their schmuckiness is often a by-product of their stinginess. Fox could have had "Friends," but refused to agree to a hundred-and-fifty-thousand-dollar penalty if it didn't run the show. It could have tried to lock Simon Cowell into a long-term contract on "American Idol," but was so doubtful about the show that it offered him only twenty-five thousand dollars or so for the first season. (After "Idol" became a colossal hit, the price of retaining Cowell, its unexpected star, rose to a sum that Carter puts at thirty-six million dollars a year.) Warner Bros. Television could have owned "Desperate Housewives," but refused to pay a minuscule thirty-thousand-dollar-per-episode "package fee" to the writer's agents. NBC's head of drama at the time, Chris Conti, passed on the show, telling one of its advocates, "Yeah, it's a really good script. But Zucker will never make it"—when Conti hadn't even read it. And Susan Lyne, who championed the show at ABC, was fired shortly before it went on the air and restored the network's fortunes.

Rife with ego and misrule, network television seems to demand satirical treatment. Carter doesn't do satire, but, if you don't mind a little home assembly, his book certainly provides the stuff of it. We get Peter Roth, the head of Warner Bros. Television, stirringly telling Matt LeBlanc, "I choose to live my life half-full, not half-empty. I believe you could create history here, Matt. I really do." Roth was trying to persuade LeBlanc to do "Joey." We're present when Les Moonves, attending a Jewish charity event, learns that his network preëmpted the last few minutes of "C.S.I.: N.Y." to report on the death of Yasir Arafat—after he gave orders to the contrary. Moonves, who later fired the producer responsible, announces to the CBS table, "We were fucked by Arafat again." And we witness the struggle between the head of Fox Television Entertainment, Sandy Grushow, who declared, "I, personally, would rather fail with quality than succeed with garbage," and Mike Darnell, the network's head of reality programming and the man behind "Alien Autopsy: Fact or Fiction?" and "When Animals Attack." Darnell's philosophy: "It's best not to have an opinion about a show until you see how big the ratings are." Guess who's still in his job. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Attack, *by Yasmina Khadra, translated from the French by John Cullen (Doubleday; $18.95).* Dr. Amin Jaafari, an Israeli Arab, seems fully assimilated into Tel Aviv society, with a loving wife, a successful career as a surgeon, and numerous Jewish friends. But after a restaurant bombing kills nineteen people, and it becomes apparent that his wife was the bomber, he plunges into the world of Islamic extremism, trying to understand how he missed signs of her intentions. Khadra (the nom de plume of Mohammed Moulessehoul) vividly captures Jaafari's anguish and his anger at the fanatics who recruited his wife. The Israelis don't escape lightly, either, as their army marches over law-abiding Arab citizens in an attempt to stamp out the militants. Khadra's writing has a tendency toward cliché, but the book's dark vision of the conflict is powerful.

A Strange Commonplace, *by Gilbert Sorrentino (Coffee House; $14.95).* One never expects traditional plots from Sorrentino, who has published poetry and fiction since the nineteen-sixties, but one can usually count on wit, vigorous prose, and an unflinchingly bleak take on life. His new novel (the title is taken from a William Carlos Williams poem) is a series of vignettes that present men and women obsessed by the missteps of love, betrayal, and desire. The cast includes a dentist unhinged by sexual fantasies and two brothers, each of whom has an affair with the other's wife, and there is an alarming tale of a man and his homburg. Despite the bleakness, Sorrentino regards his characters with tenderness: "He wished that he could chafe his barely breathing nostalgia into a delicious, a self-satisfied sadness." The novel is divided into fifty-two discrete parts—a dazzlingly original deck of cards.



Stravinsky, *by Stephen Walsh (Knopf; $40).* The second volume of Walsh's remarkably thorough two-part biography begins with Stravinsky arriving in America—his European roots severed by the Second World War and the deaths of his mother, his wife, and his elder daughter—bringing with him a longtime mistress and a neoclassical style that soon goes out of fashion. The story gathers strength with the entry, in the late nineteen-forties, of Robert Craft, a young conductor of overpowering ambition. Craft made Stravinsky's later works possible, patiently introducing him to twelve-tone music, and eventually became such an intimate that a breach with Stravinsky's children was inevitable. Negotiating the ensuing web of lawsuits, wounded egos, and tax-avoidance schemes, Walsh, an academic musicologist who writes with the verve of a first-rate critic, never loses sight of the incandescent figure at its center, a man whose supposedly inexpressive music became "the best response to those terrifying years that brought it into being."

You Must Set Forth at Dawn, *by Wole Soyinka (Random House; $26.95).* Early in this memoir, Soyinka, the Nobel-winning playwright, says that he is "a closet glutton for tranquillity." The account that follows details a decidedly untranquil life of activism, imprisonment, and exile over the past half century. In 1956, as a Nigerian student in England, Soyinka considered joining the Hungarian uprising against the Soviets, thinking it a "perfect rehearsal" for future African insurgencies, but his father advised, "Kindly return home and make this your battlefield." The bulk of the book concerns Soyinka's struggles against one corrupt Lagos administration after another, shedding light on the outsize characters of African politics. Along the way, Soyinka recalls how once, in Venice, W. H. Auden tried to pass him off as an African prince, and reveals that, after winning the Nobel Prize, he came down with writer's block, "overwhelmed by the futility of everything I had ever done."

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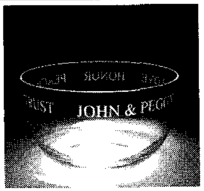

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THE THEATRE

SHINING HOURS

Star turns from Oliver Platt, Brían F. O'Byrne, and Nilaja Sun.

BY HILTON ALS

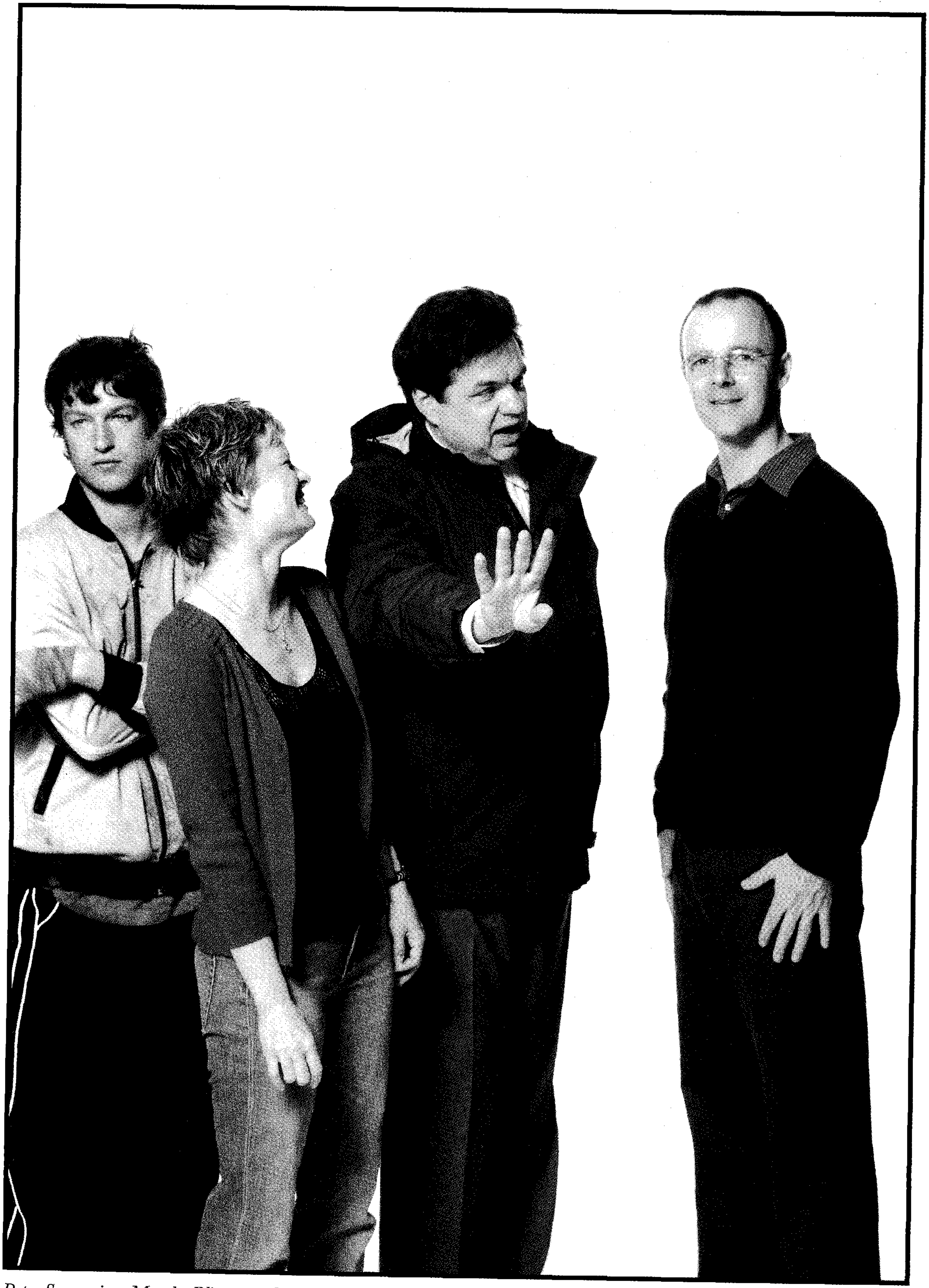
Of the many images that the prolific actor and director Charles Laughton left behind in his relatively brief lifetime—production stills, head shots, off-the-cuff newspaper photographs—the most effective are Carl Van Vechten's 1940 portraits of the artist. Although he is out of costume and out of character, the Yorkshire-born star brings to these photographs something of his signature role, as Quasimodo in the heart-wrenching 1939 film "The Hunchback of Notre Dame." In Van Vechten's artful, awkward images, Laughton seems uncomfortable in his body, a soft mound of clay; leaning forward, he does not know what to do with his hands, his mouth. He peers at the photographer's lens with a degree of panic, as though pleading for a character to hide behind. Like many great actors, Laughton was well aware that playing a part—inhabiting someone else's drama—gave him the extra layer of skin he needed in order to express himself.

The Canadian-born actor Oliver Platt has a way of moving through space—tentatively, suspiciously, delicately—that recalls Laughton's haunted presence. At forty-six, Platt, who is currently a cast member on the television comedy "Huff," among other things, looks like an overgrown version of the boy who is picked on in the school yard for his pudginess, his conspicuous height, and his sad pudding of a face. In movie roles from the smarmy press attaché in Warren Beatty's underrated 1998 political comedy "Bulworth" to the conscience-stricken villain in Eric Blakeney's "Gun Shy" (2000), Platt has charmed with all the unspoken tension of a child trying desperately not to be bullied. Among Hollywood's many bland faces and muscled bodies, he sticks out like a bemused sore thumb.

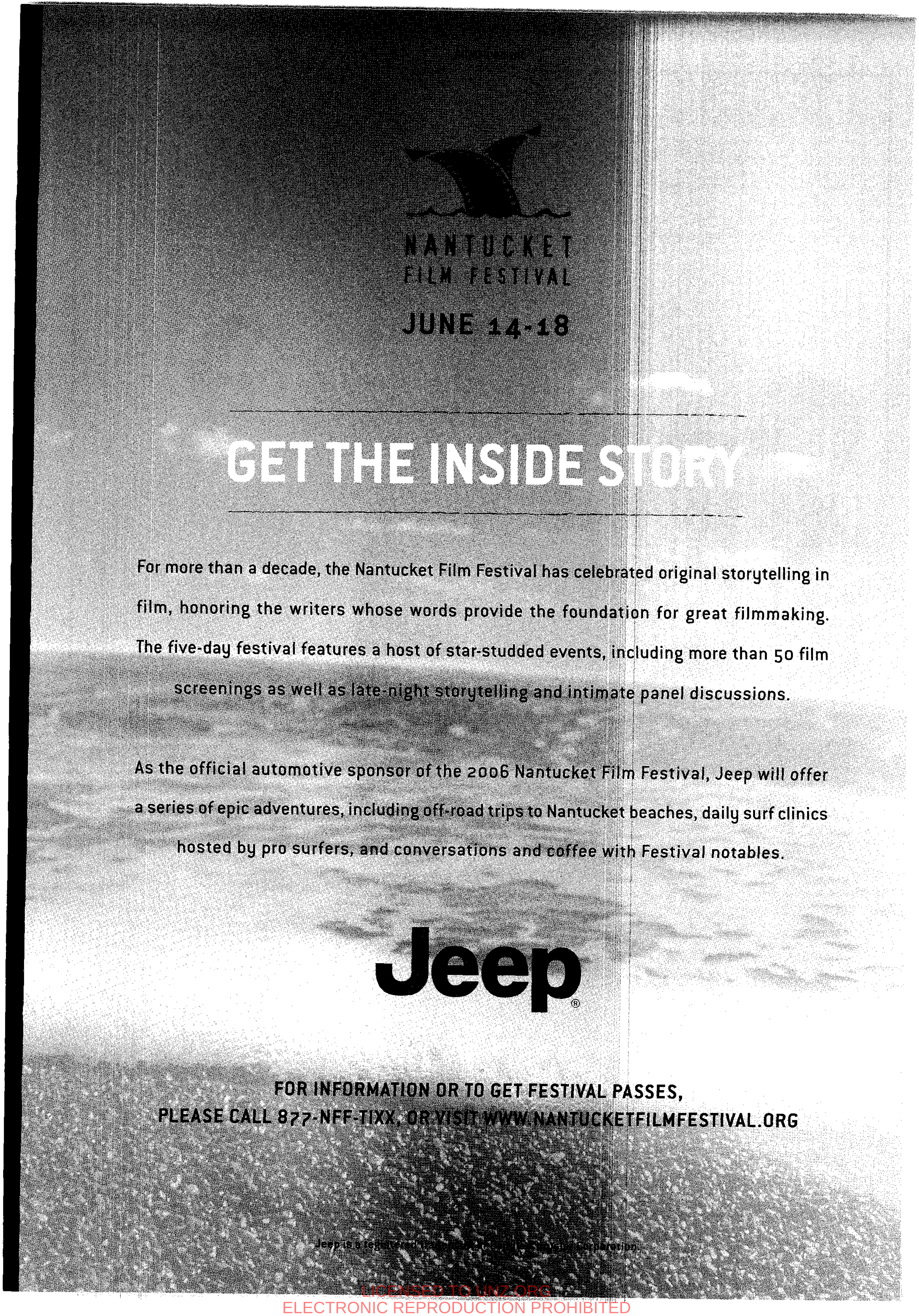
What a pleasure, then, it is to see Platt in the flesh. Making his Broadway début as the grieving widower, John, in the Irish playwright Conor McPherson's "Shining City" (a Manhattan Theatre Club production at the Biltmore), Platt talks a blue streak. John has come to a priest turned therapist named Ian (Brían F. O'Byrne), who he hopes will help him cope with his guilt and anguish over the recent loss of his wife. In a blue hooded poncho, John arrives at Ian's nondescript Dublin office and temporary living space—Ian has just left his girlfriend—with the shyness and bravado of a single man on a first date. He does not know how to expose himself to Ian; yet he wants to do nothing but. Taking a seat in the office, John brings his right hand to his mouth as he describes his wife's death in a car accident; his knees tremble as he relays his sudden loneliness. He hesitates before explaining to Ian that he feels he is living with a ghost. Is he mad? What will become of him? The scene goes black. We're left with more questions than clues.

The lights come up next on Ian and his girlfriend, Neasa (Martha Plimpton). Stripped of his professional role, Ian is as articulate as a bungling, confused, unengaged boyfriend can be. Neasa is impatient with the road that he has chosen—to move forward alone. What about their child? she asks. Their domestic partnership? But Ian himself can barely make sense of his motives. He cannot move toward Neasa to comfort her, nor can he look away from the grief he has caused. Blackout again.

"Shining City" is a play about listening—one of the hardest activities for an actor to perform without calling attention to himself. While both Platt and Plimpton are excellent in their roles—and they do nicely with their respective working-class and lower-middle-class Irish accents, too—it's O'Byrne who has the hardest job technically: he must hold up a mirror to two confused souls without conveying his own character's confusion in their presence. In fact, we



Peter Scanavino, Martha Plimpton, Oliver Platt, and Brían F. O'Byrne, the cast of "Shining City." Photograph by Steve Pyke.



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see little of his confusion until the end of this quick, ninety-minute play. (Ian's dilemma appears, finally, in the form of a beautiful street urchin named Laurence, played by the outstanding Peter Scanavino, who provides Ian with the comfort that he's afraid to ask for, even when—like a patient with a shrink—he's paying for it.)

O'Byrne makes Ian a compelling cipher: Has he eradicated his own feelings under the guise of caring for his patients? Or did he become a therapist precisely so that his patients would act out for him? In any case, what O'Byrne makes clear is his character's fixed nature. It's in the way he holds his tight body, and in the dead calm of his silence, which he uses as a way of legitimatizing Ian's closed-down personality, his emotional parsimony. (O'Byrne was similarly powerful, two years ago, in the role of a child murderer in Bryony Lavery's "Frozen.")

Despite the actors' hard work and their illuminating presence, however, "Shining City" is not much of a play. The writing is thin and inconsequential—it feels like an undeveloped first draft. McPherson, who had a hit on Broadway with "The Weir," in 1999, fails to engage the audience; he doesn't even annoy. The script is as flat as O'Byrne's Ian, and not nearly as arresting. Still, one is grateful to the director, Robert Falls, for having assembled this cast. He has confirmed for us, at least, that Oliver Platt can play just about anyone: even, perhaps, the stage role that Laughton made famous—Brecht's "Galileo," in which the astronomer burns a hole in the world with his soul.

"From now on we are nothing but Thespians," Nilaja Sun tells her high-school drama students at the beginning of her astounding one-woman performance piece, "No Child . . ." (an Epic Theatre Center production at the Beckett). When a student questions Sun on the word's meaning she defines it with enthusiasm: "Thespian! It means actor, citizen, lover of all things great." That Sun has done something great in this show is without question. That she has managed to bring politics that don't preach and a heart that is not lachrymose to the enterprise is more than ample evidence of her skill as a writer: it is a testament to her intelligence and to the strong moral center that guides her.

The piece is based on Sun's own experiences teaching in a tough New York City high school, while juggling problems with the I.R.S. and getting the back rent to her landlord. Taking on a number of roles—a disaffected student, a surly security guard, a school administrator, and a no-nonsense teacher, among others—Sun, who is half Puerto Rican, half black, and who possesses a face-splitting grin that is entirely universal, exposes the hypocrisy from which the play takes its name. She shows us the real-life ramifications of the Department of Education's 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, a pet project of President Bush's, which penalizes struggling public schools that fail to meet its standards of "accountability." Like Lily Tomlin and Whoopi Goldberg in their early work, Sun brings us not her world but *the* world. She doesn't differentiate between herself and the vulnerable characters she portrays. She doesn't lord her own education over that of the poor kids she's trying to mold into good citizens and lovers of art. And she doesn't sentimentalize her depiction of the ways in which urban children with no money, and thus no future, often fail to survive their momentary brushes with beauty: instead, they get pregnant or they get shot; in time, they are forgotten. "No Child . . ." honors the people whose lives supply material for Sun's stories. In giving themselves to Sun, they've given her herself. Thank God for that, and for Sun's passionate, committed director, Hal Brooks, who scored a hit last year with another solo work, Will Eno's "Thom Pain (Based on Nothing)." By showing us how the other half lives, Sun and Brooks provide an object lesson in what should not be missing from any life curriculum: hope. ♦

HOW'S THAT AGAIN? DEPARTMENT

From the Sacramento Bee.

That sentence affected the sentence handed down Wednesday for hit-and-run, Hightower said, because the law says the maximum sentence for a person being tried simultaneously for several crimes is for the crime with the longest sentence, which was receiving stolen property.

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THE CURRENT CINEMA

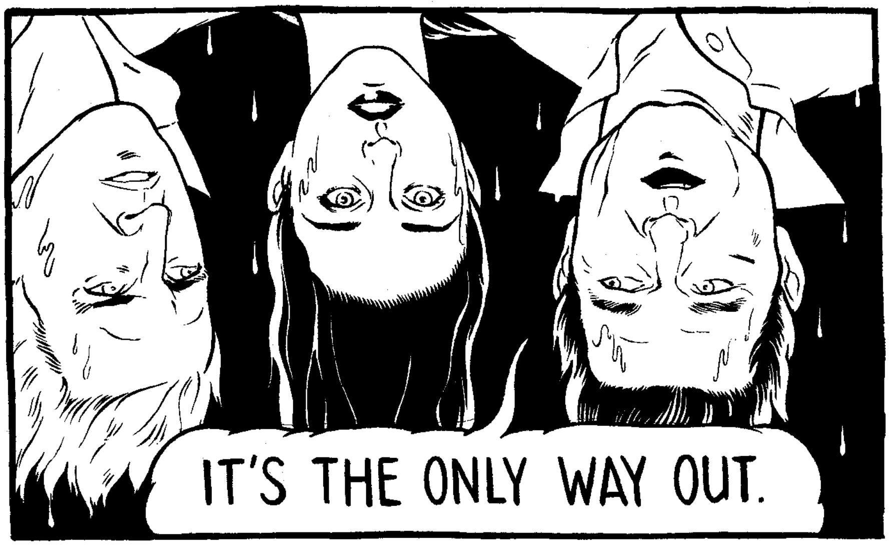
SINK OR SWIM

“Poseidon” and “Russian Dolls.”

BY DAVID DENBY

Wolfgang Petersen, the director of “Das Boot” and “The Perfect Storm,” is back in the water. In “Poseidon,” a remake of “The Poseidon Adventure,” the German-born Petersen swamps a ship, sends rivets popping, and washes away furniture, crockery, and corpses in a foamy digital flood. What is it with this guy and the sea? Something prenatal, perhaps. I don’t know that anyone was longing for a new version of the campy disaster “classic” from 1972. Real disasters have recently taken hold of our imagination—and of our movies, too. After you’ve seen “United 93,” it’s hard to regard “Poseidon” as anything more than an extremely well-crafted exercise in physical invention and fear. Yet within those limits—the limits of a pop-digital survival drama—“Poseidon” is an exciting show. Petersen appears both to love water and to be intensely afraid of it; he may not have anything fresh to say, but he’s wrung an infinite variety of physical sensations out of his obsession.

Three decades ago, the producer Irwin Allen, an indefatigable marketer of cinematic destruction, entertained an innocent public with such spectacles as “The Towering Inferno” and “The Swarm.” In “The Poseidon Adventure,” his most famous extravaganza, a giant wave hits a luxury passenger vessel, which turns turtle and slowly begins to sink. Gene Hackman, as a priest who doesn’t believe in waiting for God’s help, takes charge of the worst group of neurotics ever gathered together in an upside-down ocean liner, and leads them upward to the hull. Most of the performances, as orchestrated by Ronald Neame, the director, border on the excruciating. Stella Stevens, paired up with the noisy Ernest Borgnine, plays a snarly ex-hooker stripped down to her panties; the late Shelley Winters squeezes her complaining flesh through narrow corridors, sighing and moaning right up to the moment where she dives in and swims underwater for what seems an eternity, and saves the day. Like many cult favorites, “The Poseidon Adventure” is mad and silly and Hollywoodish—an escape drama that pauses frequently for sermons, quarrels, and bouts of bizarre overacting. The movie is truly effective only when it sticks to the sinister oddity of a topsy-turvy world—such as when a little boy wanders into an inverted men’s room and sees gaping urinals hanging high up on the walls.


IT'S THE ONLY WAY OUT.

Josh Lucas, Emmy Rossum, and Kurt Russell in Wolfgang Petersen’s new movie.

GRANT SHAFFER

One of the disappointing things about the original “Poseidon” was that the wave hitting the ship wasn’t much—children splashing a boat in the tub could do as well. But this time the water really comes thundering down, and, throughout the movie, Petersen has a dynamic feel for the rush and heave of the deluge, the pent-up energy, the sheer heft and momentum. Even more than James Cameron in “Titanic,” the man is a master of the studio water tank: the monster that pushes and threatens and finally comes bursting through the wall to get you is more dangerous than any creature. And, when the ship keels over, the inexorable sliding of people and tables—at first slow, and then faster and faster—produces a form of vertigo that alternates between hilarity and terror.

Unwilling to waste time, Petersen, working with Mark Protosevich’s terse screenplay, rushes through the opening expository stuff. He moves ahead so rapidly that he momentarily forgoes garden-variety plausibility: after the ship overturns, the principal characters quickly and inexplicably gather at one side of a crowded ballroom. They act as if they had seen the original movie, and, on the spot, they decide to trust Josh Lucas, who plays the inspirational Hackman role—that’s Josh Lucas, whose rakish smile and quicksilver temper make him perhaps the least trustworthy-looking actor in movies today. Lucas plays a poker-table hustler who mysteriously possesses the precise skills required to lead people through passageways littered with burned bodies and broken electric lines hissing and snapping like cobras. His followers include Kurt Russell, in a poorly written part, as an authoritarian former mayor of New York; Emmy Rossum as his rebellious daughter; and Richard Dreyfuss as an aging gay man jilted by his longtime lover. In the course of their adventures, the usual character conflicts—Will Russell respect his daughter’s young fiancé? Will Dreyfuss find a reason to go on living?—get resolved. But, thank God, the characters don't stop to "develop." Saying as little as possible, they define themselves in action. Into the air ducts they go.

In the first movie, Allen and Neame kept us inside the maze. But Petersen repeatedly goes back outside and looks at the huge craft, shifting and groaning, hull up, as water rushes into ballast chambers and brings the beast ever deeper. We need these outside views, if only to better appreciate the progress of the survivors within. Mashed, whomped in the face with exploding hatches, bloodied, gargled again and again, the actors give a good impression of going through hell, and they look genuinely the worse for wear. Their eyes bulge, they go hoarse, they are badly mussed. The cinematographer, John Seale, has illuminated the movie from where the light source should be, on the floor (which was the ceiling), so that some of the faces and bodies have a supernal glow, like the figures in an old religious painting. Wolfgang Petersen may have water on the brain, but he gets the audience to feel whatever it is that's roiling his unconscious.

When a man falls in love with a woman he's watching in a movie, and the hero of that movie doesn't respond to the woman the way he should, the man feels that he himself has been romantically betrayed, thinking, What's wrong with this idiot? Is he blind? That was my response to Romain Duris's long spell of indifference to the wonderful Kelly Reilly in the new French comedy "Russian Dolls," and it took me a while to realize that the director, Cédric Klapisch, expects the audience to respond exactly the way that I did. Duris plays Xavier, a thirtyish cipher, who, along with Reilly's character, Wendy, was one of the roommates in Klapisch's 2002 movie, "L'Auberge Espagnole." In that friendly, lightweight fable of the European Union, seven young people from all over the Continent spend a year together in a Barcelona flat. At the end of "L'Auberge," Xavier returns home to Paris. In the new movie, set five years later, his life has become a pointless mess. A hack journalist and screenwriter, he doesn't seem to know what he wants to write (he has taste but no apparent interests), or who he is, or which woman he wants to make love to. He drifts from bed to bed without much pleasure. Sent to London to write a pedestrian TV movie, he teams up with Wendy, who is now a screenwriter herself. Wendy has love troubles of her own; she can't seem to rid herself of her addiction to a shaggy lout. Lots of actresses don't seem to respond personally to the actors they work with, but the long-limbed, red-headed Reilly, who was born in Surrey in 1977, and has been active on the London stage as well as in movies, engages each man she meets onscreen with her face, her body, her breathing. Around Duris, she has a way of lowering her eyes in shame which grabs at your heart. Eventually, Wendy hooks up with Xavier, but he runs back to a narcissistic model with pouty lips whom he's been seeing, the cad.

"Russian Dolls" is framed as a backward-looking narrative. On the high-speed Paris-London train, Xavier, writing on a laptop (he has to power up in the restroom), composes a story of his recent love affairs and friendships, including his betrayal of Wendy. His relationships blow up in an instant: in one, he holds a girl's hand until they wind up in bed, and, after a quarrel, she runs stark naked out onto the Paris streets, and he, also naked, runs after her. The moment is frivolous in a lyrical way that's irresistible. "Russian Dolls" offers touristic views of London, Paris, and St. Petersburg, where Wendy and Xavier both go for the wedding of another former roommate, and many pretty faces and bodies; it's froth with a sprinkling of earnest reflection. Duris, who was mesmerizing last year as the jittery dynamo split between classical music and crime in "The Beat That My Heart Skipped," is sheepish here. His big head and thick thatch of hair, combined with his trim body, make him look like an overgrown boy who's puzzled about everything. Xavier's producers tell him that his scripts need romantic fantasy, but his own experience tells him that romance, in real life, is a mess, a comedy, even a disaster. Klapisch fashions the dénouement as an ironic joke: love, he suggests, has to embrace fantasy and even cliché at a certain point or it's not quite love. People must declare themselves, just as lovers in a lousy movie do: the man and the woman must kiss at the back of a boat with all of St. Petersburg arrayed around them. The only way Xavier can find himself is to realize that the woman he has treated so badly is the only woman for him. It's not as if we couldn't have told him so. ♦

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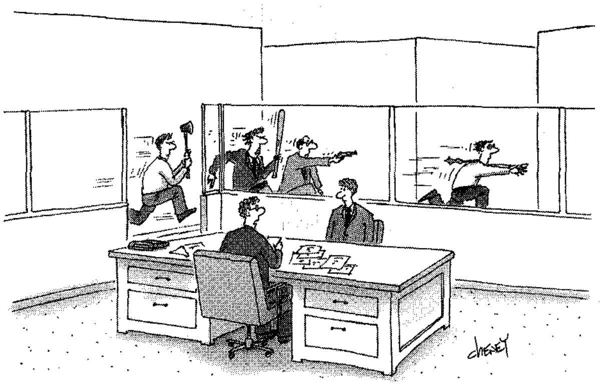
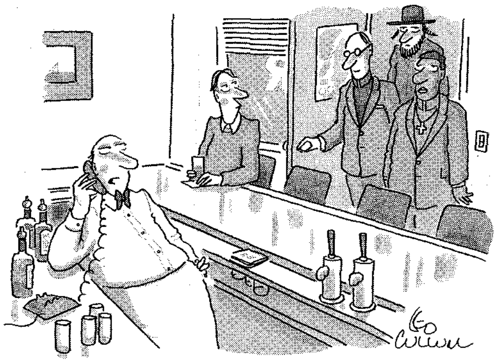
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Frank Cotham, must be received by Sunday, May 21st. Finalists in the May 8th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the June 5th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"How soon can you start?"
John Maynard, Berkeley, Calif.



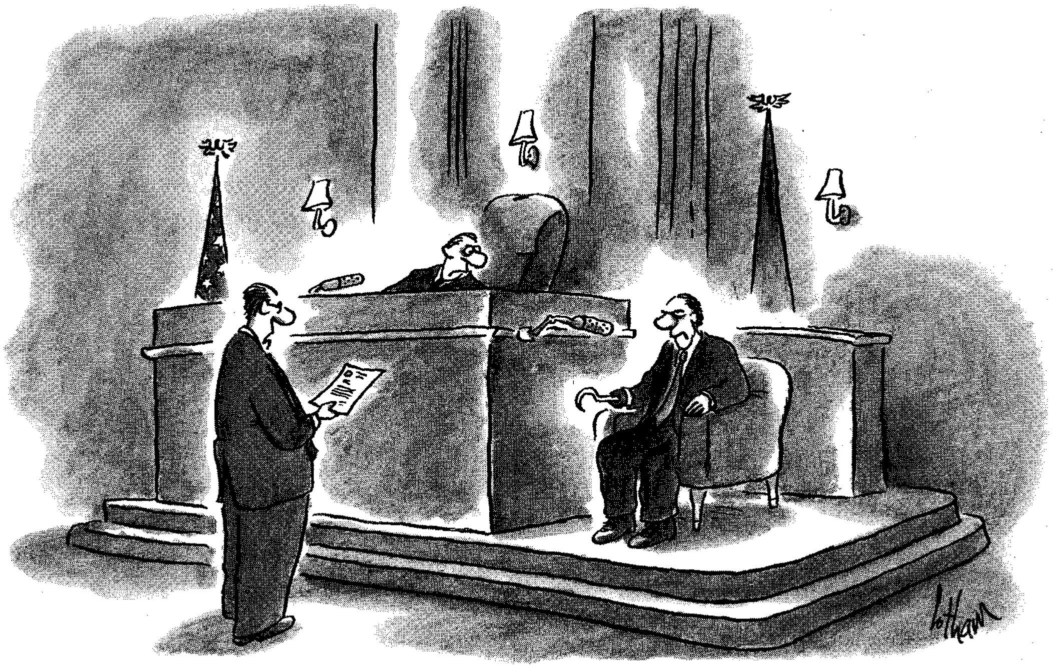
THE FINALISTS

"Stop me if you've heard this one."
Kelly Younger, Los Angeles, Calif.

"I thought I told you to stop sending me jokes at work."
Mary Kaltreider, Dover, Del.

"It's gonna be one of those long nights of playing devil's advocate."
Lawrence Voss, Mount Prospect, Ill.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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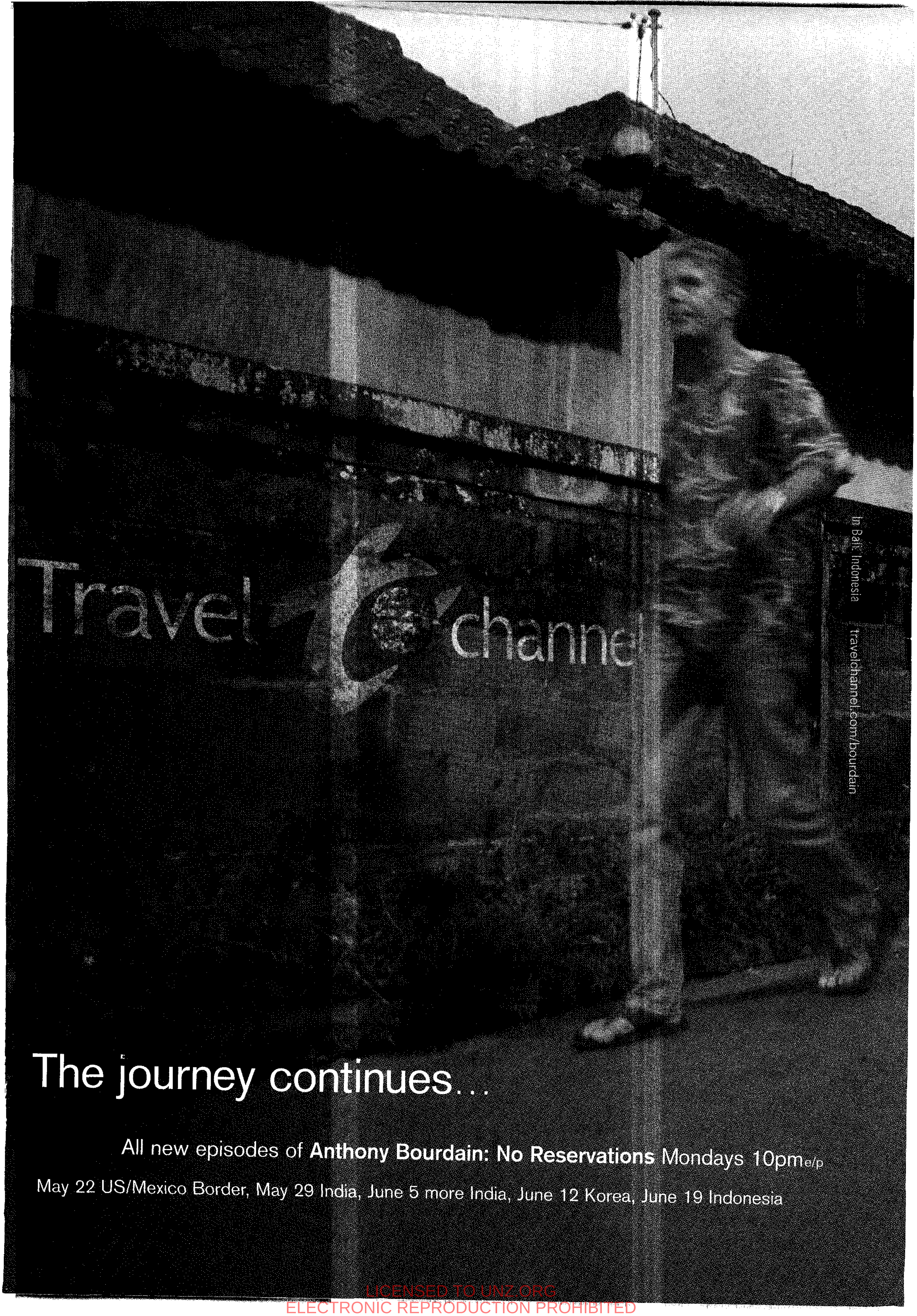
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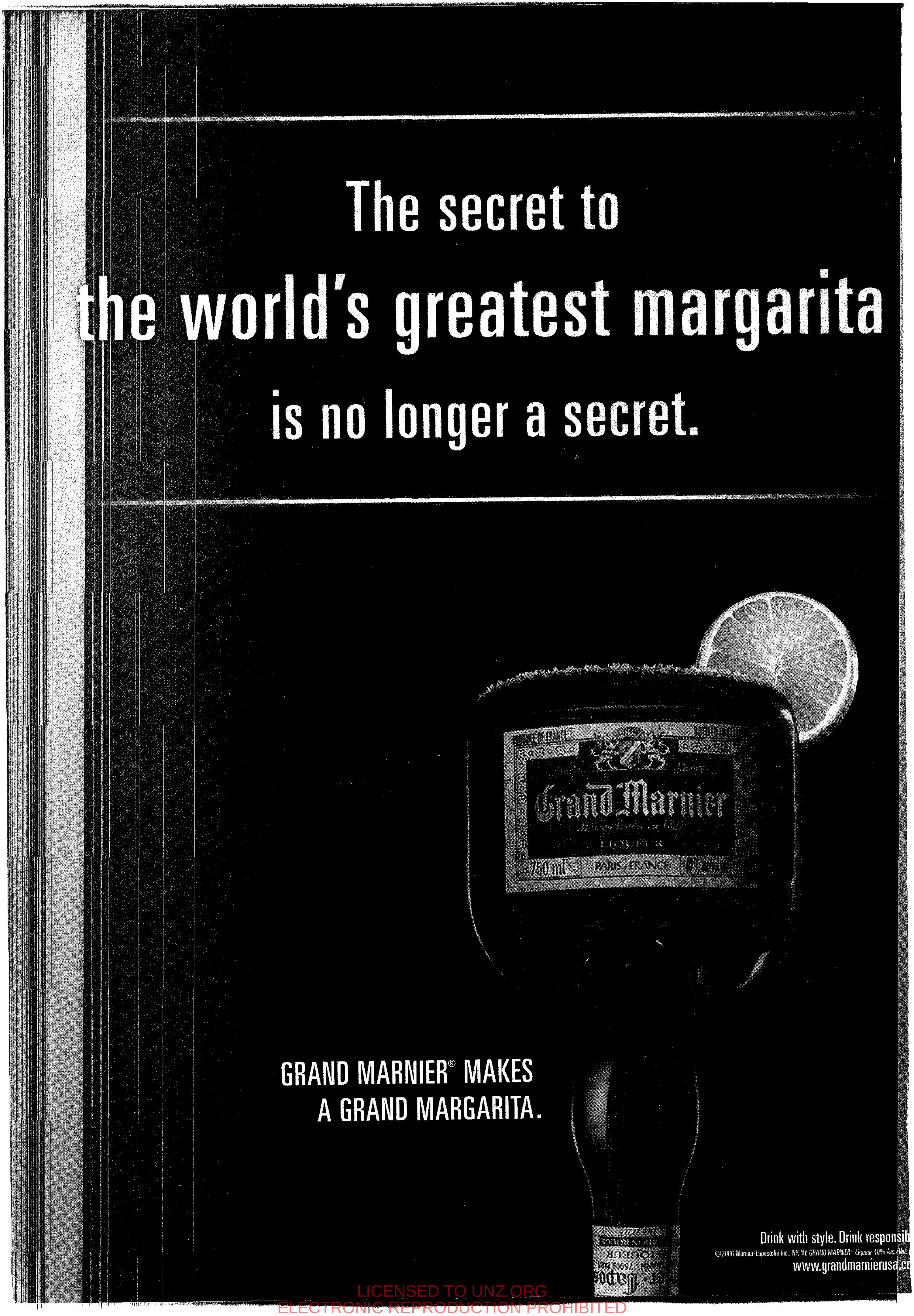
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